

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG **PCZONE.CO.UK**

PCZONE

ISSUE 223 SEPTEMBER 2010

WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

STAR WARS THE OLD REPUBLIC

SHIPS REVEALED! PVP EXPOSED!
NEW DETAILS ONLY IN PC ZONE!

INVASION USA!

HOMEFRONT

THE COLD WAR RUNS HOT! CAN THIS
REALLY BE A CALL OF DUTY BEATER?

HUGE REVEAL!

SHOGUN 2: TOTAL WAR

FIRST SCREENS! THE CLASSIC RTS SERIES TURNS JAPANESE!

FUTURE SHOCK!

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

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NUCLEAR LAUNCH DETECTED...



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PCZONE

Contents

ON A MISSION FROM GOD...

S O THERE YOU have it, my five year community service at *PC ZONE* has come to an end. The judge himself is coming around to remove the *ZONE*-branded ankle bracelet. I'm being handed back the items I came in with. My Timex digital watch, broken. My hair comb. My sunglasses. Twenty-three dollars and seven cents. A prophylactic, (soiled). And, once the parting ritual is complete, I'll be hoofed out into the blinding light of freedom and forced to fend for myself in a world that probably hates me far more than I know.

Will Porter waits outside in a battered Fiat Panda. "You traded the Zone-mobile for this?" I protest, as we pull away from the Future offices. "No," he casually retorts, "I traded it for a microphone. I'm thinking of doing a podcast or something."

We arrive at Jamie Sefton's orphanage, in what would prove to be a very humorous scene indeed. Porter and I are slapped about the head with a metre stick by a stern nun, before being sent off on a mission from God – we're getting the band back together!

In the rear view mirror I spy a parade of incompetent Nazis, and one long sequence of spectacular car crashes and cringe-worthy pile-ups. There's also an ex-girlfriend who keeps trying to kill us, but she doesn't fit into my story very well. I love you, bye bye!

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty
Acting Editor

steve.hogarty@futurenet.com



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COVER STORY

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

The most excited we've been about *Star Wars* since we saw *Lay Lady Leia*



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SHOGUN 2: TOTAL WAR

Creative Assembly are breaking out their katana and naginata again



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SUBSCRIBE TO
PCZONE



Save 25% and get
a Sega Megadrive!
See page 60





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BLUR

It's a racer, with power-ups, and no Italian plumbers in sight

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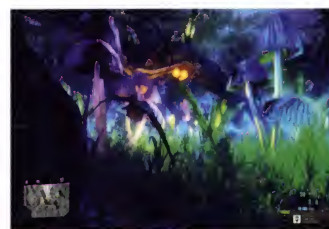
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WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



112 FREWARE

Dances with Dracula, shoots people with arrows, serves food on death row, all for absolutely nothing.

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Too busy? PC ZONE in 21 words... There's Klingons on the starboard-bow, starboard-bow, starboard-bow! There's - oh hang on, this is the other one, isn't it?

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OPERATION ARMA ARROWHEAD



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- Does not require the original Arma 2

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Dragon Quest IX

Sentinels of the Starry Skies



Life watching over humans as a guardian high up in the heavens should be plain sailing. But after a mysterious force strikes the majestic Observatory, your hero finds himself stranded in the world of mortals, without wings and full of questions. This is where you come in. Enjoy creating and customising your hero and his companions, before embarking on an adventure that will take you to every corner of a massive world. Fight unforgettable monsters, take on countless quests, and hop into other players' worlds thanks to Dragon Quest IX's seamless multiplayer mode. Here's what awaits.



For more information...

Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels Of The Starry Skies is released on 23 July. Until then, check out www.begindragonquest.co.uk for loads more info on its world, characters and customisation options!

www.dragonquest9.co.uk

Create your own hero



For the first time in the Dragon Quest series, you have complete control over the look of your hero and your party. Choose options such as hairstyle and gender, and customise your characters by selecting from over 1,000 items, weapons and armour pieces. Whether scouring the land for powerful blades, whips, hammers and more, buying protective clothing from far flung traders, or alchemising ingredients to create rare items, mixing and matching will help to create a party of adventurers perfectly balanced to deal with the many challenges that lie ahead.



Explore far horizons



Finding yourself in the village of Angel Falls, the village you protected as a guardian, you must kick on and explore the world in order to return to your celestial home. Next stop, the bustling citadel of Stornway, where you'll find the first of many traders, side-quests and quirky characters. Every town you discover has its own distinct flavour and drama, which you'll be called upon to solve – though the rewards make it all worthwhile. You never know what lies over the horizon, but one thing is for sure. Your quest will only become richer for finding out.



Battle manic monsters



On your journey you'll encounter well over 180 of the funniest and most challenging monsters, from psychotic cucumbers to giant dragons. Set battle tactics for your party and use the special abilities and powerful spells you learn to get the better of them. As you defeat each beast, you are rewarded with experience points which enable you to level up and become more powerful. As your defence and attack levels are raised, you learn incredible new techniques, giving you the confidence to venture into new areas populated with treacherous new threats.



Share your quest



Using the DS's local wireless network, you'll be able to connect with fellow players and team up on your adventures. It's easy: make sure you're within range, then you'll be invited to step into another player's world – or vice versa. Then you can continue your journey together, teaming up to overcome even more powerful enemies and sharing the huge rewards on offer. Plus, a unique Canvass Mode allows you to swap vital information with fellow players, such as treasure maps. All you have to do is leave Dragon Quest IX in standby mode!



SQUARE ENIX. NINTENDO DS. Nintendo

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Letters

Steve Hogarty braves a deluge of digital correspondence, and for what? This?



WIN!

If your letter is picked out to become the King (or Queen) of these here pages, you will receive your own copy of *Splinter Cell: Conviction* (or at least another good game we have knocking around the office).



FITTING FINALE

Why are game endings and finales so bloody awful? Take *Alpha Protocol* as a recent example. Horrible, horrible end boss fight. Guy stands on placed machine gun, shoot him a bit, dies. Wow,



An unoriginal ending awaits you, mate.

KING OF LETTERS

BRAVE NEW FUTURE

So Nintendo have announced the 3DS, a magic 3D handheld device that requires no stupid glasses. Microsoft have announced Kinect, a magic motion sensor that doesn't require you to be strapped into a gurney clutching a mechanical cyber-rod. And Sony announced a mechanical cyber-rod with optional gurney add-on.

Advancements all round, it seems. But what does the PC get? A footnote after each multi-format game trailer claiming that it'll eventually arrive on PC? Even *Portal 2*'s reveal at E3 came through an announcement that it was coming to the PlayStation. Microsoft especially, a publisher with a vested interest in the PC as a gaming platform, showed almost no interest in *Games for Windows Live*.

In summary: what the juddering fuck Steve, what the absolute titting hell is happening to our wonderful little platform?

James Levitt



The Witcher 2 will have more romance, less random shags.

True, E3 was dominated by the console behemoths pumping millions into the announcements of their respective arm-waving sensors, but the PC had an understated line-up of some great titles. *The Witcher 2*, *Star Wars: The Old Republic*, and *Portal 2*

(although, as you point out, this came with a console slant – you'd have to be a right cynic not to be excited) to name a handful, might have been eclipsed by the big-budget fanfares, but they were still there, like stars twinkling invisibly in the daylight.

must have taken ages to come up with that concept.

I thought Obsidian were better than that, but it seems they'll just take the stupid, easy way out instead of thinking hard about making an original, clever

end sequence. Also, did anyone get to shag that mute girl who follows Albatross around? I did the nasty with Mina and that reporter, but it didn't even give me a rumpy pumpy cut scene!

I'm mad as hell, I tellsya!

Billy Maicon

Game endings often don't get the love they deserve, most typically (and cynically) because games are front-loaded with their best bits and are then artificially stretched out towards the end to comply with time and budget restrictions. This makes sense too, considering how few people actually reach the end of a game.




But for every *Medal of Honor* and *BioShock*, there's a *Mass Effect 2* and *Deus Ex*. Finish more games, and game endings will improve.

TAKING UMBRAGE

In response to 'Lee', AAA Studio Developer (*The Flipside*, issue 222), I'd like to say that yes, it's fair for developers to want people to purchase their games and not download them illegally. That's a given, nobody could ever reasonably argue that you should spend two years working on a game and then give it away for free.

But I take issue with his point about "a huge number of gamers actually prefer to buy a £30-odd game from the shops or online, where they know exactly what they're getting: a high



@pczone 
letters@pczone.co.uk 
letters, pc zone, future publishing, 
2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw



"I prefer to download it first, try it and then buy it if it is good enough"

quality game of good length and a fair amount of replayability."

Really? So we know the game won't come with crippling bugs or be rendered unplayable by ludicrous DRM? And then to find out we can't take it back to the shop because they have a no returns policy on PC games?

I'm not sure I'd want to do that. I prefer to download it first, try it and then buy it if it is good enough and doesn't crash or screw up constantly. With less and less developers providing quality demos, how else am I meant to trial something before I fork out 30 valuable squids?

Andy Josimar

Spoken like a man who feels entitled to try before he buys. But is that a reasonable expectation? I think not. David thinks so. Answers on a postcard. We are literally taking a vote.

JOY VALVE

I have to say, hats off to Valve and their truly epic ways as a gaming company. They're a leading example of how it should be done.

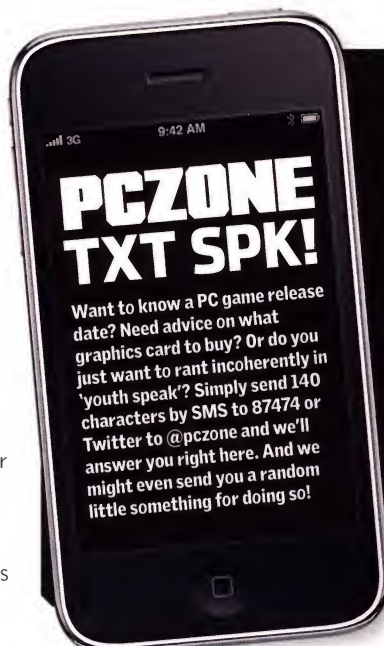
OK yes, I know. Some of their games have those little bugs and annoyances

that never seem to get fixed *coughs* facestabs. Also *Left 4 Dead* servers may have their problems but you have to admit, Valve out do themselves every time! Regular constant updates in all of their games. Even the old classic *Counter-Strike* is getting an update featuring a load of achievements and a new domination and revenge system. You also have the constant class

updates of *Team Fortress 2* and new campaigns in *Left 4 Dead*.

We've had all this silly nonsense of boycotting and, wait a second, pretty much everyone who said they would boycott the game have ended up playing the beauty. How did that work out? Well they simply couldn't resist all of it's new features which it boasted. They say it could have simply been a DLC but no, Valve are money grabbing so and so's.

Well that is the biggest load of old tosh I've ever heard in my



Just testing to see if these texts are made up or not.
YoYo Ma

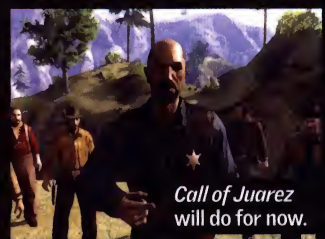
Don't be silly, of course they are.

What's the best cowboy game on PC?
Henry Winch

Call of Juarez, and a year from now: *Red Dead Redemption*.

Where do you guys eat lunch can I come?
Birchwood

We can be found in any given Nandos in London. We are a probability density function of delicious chicken.



Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87474, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text - and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

By texting PC ZONE you're agreeing to receive details of more offers from Future Publishing Limited and related third parties. If you don't want to receive any info on offers and promotions, please text the word NO INFO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 25p plus your standard network tariff rate.

YOUR SHOUT!
SEND US YOUR REVIEWS
WIN A FREE GAME!

JUST CAUSE 2

Wayne Gerson
PC ZONE SCORE 84%

You do not know the true meaning of joy until you have tied two helicopters together, flown 10,000 feet into the air, then clambered out and attempted to jump from one to the other as both plummet to the ground.

Fun is nothing but an abstract theoretical concept until you've leapt from a Harrier jet onto a rocket and destroyed it with plastic explosive as it thunders it's way upwards toward the stratosphere.

Just Cause 2 takes *GTA4*'s po-faced gameplay and cackles as it carves a bloody smile into Niko Bellic's eternally grumpy face. Why so serious Niko? Why so serious?

YOUR SHOUT 90%



Send your reviews with a maximum of 120 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.

An unreasonably
pricey PC that is.



"Yes it's a top end, fly-by-the-seat-of your-pants monster... but £5,500?"

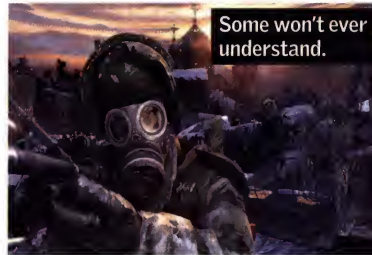
Life! Valve churn out countless free updates for their games. It seems endless how many times they have updated *Tf2*, I think they're on about their 124th update or thereabout.

This letter is purely a thank you to the Valve team and also to make aware to others reading this that you should thank them too. Just compare them to EA and you'll see how much better they really are.

Oh I almost forgot, great magazine you have going here.

Sam Clusker

All we need now is for Valve and Google to merge, and open a bank into which we can pile our savings, safe in the knowledge that they're the least evil companies on the planet. I can't wait to make mortgage payments through *Steam*.



Some won't ever
understand.

CHEAP AS CHIPS

I'm one of those "in their 30s" gamers, I'm not proud of it and my wife certainly doesn't see the merit in stalking across post-apocalyptic Russia, or conquering anyone that dares threaten my empires, but any how, the reason I write is because it was pretty shocked by the Yoyotech MLK3 (issue 220).

Yes it's a top end, fly-by-the-seat-of your-pants monster of a machine, it looks gorgeous and it will eat up any benchmark, but £5,500? I'm horrified because since my 20s I've been building my own PC to save the pennies, my first was a AMD K6 with a Voodoo1 card, it was as reliable as my MG Maestro and sounded like it too.

I'm pleased to say that things have moved on and last year I built my dream machine for a budget of £3,000, certainly not boasting here since it took me a long time and a few trips to the penny machine at Sainsbury's to afford it. Its performance is very close to the MLK3's and the point of my letter is simple: if you can built it yourself, do it! The pride factor and sheer pleasure out of seeing your first benchmark result, and whacking up all settings in your favourite frag-a-phone is worth the cursing and nervous first POST (please beep at me damn you!). You'll know it like your left arm and love it like your mum, you'll clean it, nurse it and tweak it for that extra 2% performance.

Yes if I wanted to go top-end now and get the best out of DirectX 11 I would need to spend more money, but why? For the extra 3fps? Shop around, do some reading, read the forums and go for it, it's not as hard as many think and pure pleasure!

Jeff

There's a certain joy in building a PC from scratch: patiently soldering the transistors into place, layering the silicon wafers with micrometer accuracy to ensure those extra megahertz aren't being



MYSTIC WILL'S SERIAL KILLER

Give me your codes,
I will dispense prophecy

Dear Mystic Will,
While installing a game I was prompted to input the following code into my PC. Baffled, I did as instructed, but upon completing the code I glanced out the window, only to see every star in the universe going supernova at once. What's up with that?
JN50-0M6A-THRM8-SRGH-57JH-ETJK7
Kurt Wallander

I'm getting faint psychic readings from this one. Immediately the words Juno and Omaha are obvious, codenames for beaches in the Normandy Landing, but from there the message is confused and garbled. Theramin? Sergei? If I tried to divine meaning from this one I'd be making it up as I go along, something I refuse to lower myself to. Apologies, but this one remains unsolved for now.

Have you got a mystic serial key you'd like Mystic Will to divine? Then send it in to letters@pczone.co.uk. Readings are guaranteed 100% accurate.

flung into space and are instead funnelled appropriately into the northbridge, which you have constructed brick by brick.

My plaudits again go to the likes of Scan for offering insurance against breaking stuff as you install it, allowing any old numpty to have a go at sticking a PC together. And as long as you're not shoving in some obscure components while blindfolded, there's actually not much that can go wrong.

AROUND THE WORLD



One reader is exactly 5,895 metres above the other, and that's the way we like it. Hurray! We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Every one printed wins a prize!



A CITY IS MADE OF ITS PEOPLE; YOU ARE THOSE PEOPLE



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COVER STORY

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC



THIS IS GOING to be the biggest game ever. It's going to stack up BioWare's substantial back catalogue, then stand next to it, laughing at how insignificant it looks. It's going to do for *Star Wars* what Sony Online's *Galaxies* did for a while, before it decided to go mental and start eating itself. But nearly two years into the public relations spin cycle, we're still not completely sure how *The Old Republic* will work. So let's link pinkies and look at the latest news, study those old reveals with the benefits of hindsight, and make some wild and optimistic predictions about the world's first fully voice acted MMO.

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**"It's going to do for *Star Wars*
what *Galaxies* did for a while"**



UPFRONT

Everything that matters in the **world of PC gaming**KAOS
REIGNS

Steve Hogarty

T HIS IS EMBARRASSING isn't it? After all the commotion of me leaving *PC ZONE* in my first column, I've gone and left my keys in your Upfront section. And it's not even nearly as sexy as it sounds. I'll just grab them, which in this metaphor means "introduce the section", and then I'll be properly off.

Star Wars: The Old Republic, then. BioWare have dropped the hot infotato on our laps: news that you'll be able to scoot around space inside your very own spaceship, just like Han Solo, or the other man who has a spaceship and a vagina for a face.

Meanwhile, *Shogun 2: Total War* – which is set a long time after *Star Wars*, as fans of rather basic geek-trivia will already know – will further cement Creative Assembly's dominance of the genre, and hopefully spawn at least one bad TV show in which two teams scream at some pixels until they're breathless, sweaty and historically informed.

Homefront on the other hand, is coming out of nowhere. We berate its kooky alt-future plot starting on page 64, but personally I think Kaos Studios are about ready to build something spectacular following a string of resoundingly average titles. THQ badly want their own *Call of Duty* franchise, and they recognise that getting this game right could lead to swimming pools, diamond-coated helicopter parades and golden monkeys in a decade's time. For that reason alone, Kaos should have a lot of rope to play with. Now let's just hope they don't hang themselves from the nearest water tower.



ALIEN INVASION

XCOM begins to materialise before our eyesDEVELOPER 2K Marin PUBLISHER 2K Games WEBSITE xcom.com ETA Winter 2011

I F YOU'RE WORRYING about how the new *XCOM* will compare to the original series, there's at least one way in which it'll be the same: you'll be weak as anything to start with, so running away will be a regularly used strategy during your early UFO hunting career.

Other than that, there seems to be very little that *XCOM* has in common with *X-Com*, other than you fight aliens. To start with, your alien hunters won't be Dolph Lundgren look-a-like soldiers in power armour, and there won't be a near-future setting. Instead, *XCOM*'s going to have trilby wearing FBI agents and white picket fences, as it's going to be set in '50s suburban America.

Some concepts will remain, but they'll only be vaguely related. For example, the missions will stem from a central hub – the *XCOM* base – from where you can choose to go off hunting aliens to get cash to support the program, scour the world for Elerium

Once you've decided to leave the safety of *XCOM*'s HQ, you'll enter a first-person shooter mode.

The team behind *XCOM* is formed by people who created *SWAT 4*, *Freedom Force* and both *BioShock* games. The *BioShock* influence is blatant: besides

"There seems to be very little that XCOM has in common with X-Com"

(the resource needed to fund alien research and weapons development), and win the hearts and minds of US citizens. These missions are determined by what you've been doing in regards to research and investments.

the historical look *XCOM*'s has a 'take photos to research' mechanic.

The art style looks gorgeous – the gameplay we've seen looks like what would've happened if *Mad Men* had been about alien invasion – and it has

STOP
PRESS!

USER GENERATED

Ubisoft have announced *ManiaPlanet*, a user-generated content platform made by *TrackMania* developer Nadeo, with a beta in 2011.

GET QUADDLED

We've learnt that *Medal of Honor* will have quad bikes, as its trailer from E3 features them. As long as we can run people over in them, we'll be happy.

LASER QUEST

A bizarre one this: light guns, harnesses and a PC keeping score. *Battle Tag* (battle-tag.uk.ubi.com) is a 4v4 Lazer Tag game that runs on a PC. One to keep an eye on.

36 F**KED UP GAMES

The PC's most seriously messed up games.



48 DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

We're lovin' the cyborgs, but we're still wondering if it'll be worthy of the original.



54 SHOGUN 2: TOTAL WAR

Creative Assembly head back to the Far East.



OK, that's alien.

"BP will pay for this, I swear!"

And yet, it's not as scary as 2001's monolith.

the potential to be a great shooter, if things are done right. There's also still loads to learn about it, but 2K are remaining so tight-lipped they could be working for a shadowy government agency willing to inflict a dreadful cost on anyone who talks to the press.

This game is definitely one of those that needs playing before proper impressions can be formed, as it's too easy for those weaned on the originals to go, "It's not the same, therefore rubbish." The introduction of a 'goo grenade' – a Globotov – points towards an imaginative approach, so perhaps 2K Marin will be leading us down the road to Goodgameville.

Even now that we've seen the trailer and we know a lot more about it, the only thing we know with any degree of certainty is *XCOM* will be completely new beast. **PC7**

STUFF

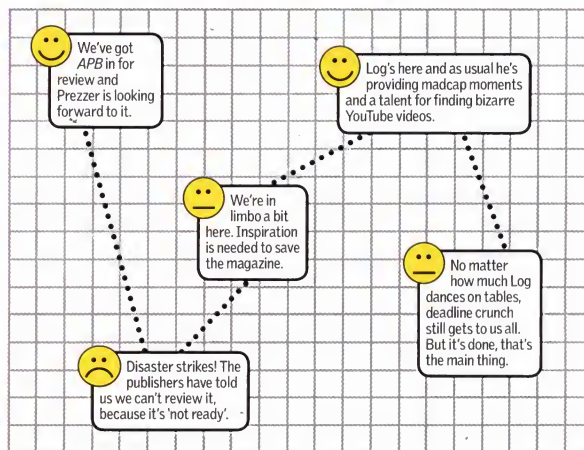
Remember *Trine*? It was a beautiful little platformer with a *Lost Vikings* twang, where you swapped between controlling three different characters – an agile thief, a lumbering warrior and a physics object-manipulating wizard – to solve platform puzzles. The reason for mentioning it again is that there's going to be a sequel, the imaginatively titled *Trine 2*. Expect it to be much the same as the first one, but with an ever-more elaborate way of getting three characters glued together as one.

LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER

GOOD TIMES

ON THE FENCE

BAD TIMES



IT BEGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

BOOKS OF REVELATION

"Where have our manuals disappeared to?", wonders *Pavel Barter*

IN NOVEMBER, 1984, David Braben heard some unusual news. *Elite*, the game he imagined as a college student, had barely been on sale two months and it had sold more copies than there were BBC Micros to play it on.

Kids across the UK had bought the game to play on their school computers, engaging in space-trading between classes. Braben also discovered that dedicated fans wanted to buy the game, rather than copy it, because its manual was a crucial bit of the *Elite* experience.

Braben and his team at Frontier Developments had made a fantastic manual. They hired the, now deceased, sci-fi author Robert Holdstock to write a novella, *The Dark Wheel*, and create a backstory for the adventure. Holdstock also helped write the manual, which included spaceship wall charts.

"The pack gave you a lot for your money," says Braben. "It upped the cost of goods. It was expensive to pack, but it helped encourage people to buy an original copy."

DEATH OF BOOKS

But that was then. Twenty-six years later, the curtain is falling on PC game manuals. In a supposedly eco-friendly move, Ubisoft are to stop printing game manuals and replace them with digital versions. This coincides with Ubisoft's new eco-friendly PC game packaging, which launched with *Splinter Cell: Conviction*. Meanwhile, other publishers create manuals barely worthy of the name, such as Activision's guide to *Modern Warfare 2* which ran to five pages.

There was a time when a game's manual was a window into another world. These books came in the form of

treasure maps, journals and novellas, drawing you into a game's metaverse before you'd booted it up: *Diablo II* came with an anthropological study of Amazons, Barbarians, Necromancers and Sorceresses, and the world in which they lived; *StarCraft* had realms of information on its factions fictional geography and culture; while *Wing Commander III*'s featured details of the game's characters, including their e-mail addresses (very sci-fi in 1993 when the internet was teething).

Elite's success led to novellas being packaged with other titles, many of badly written and barely related to the game. But some manuals continued the tradition of expanding on the fictional world, such as the *Field Guide* that came with Black Isle's *Fallout* (1997).

"Way back then, in the late '90s, installing a game from CD-ROM could

WINTER / SPRING CATALOG & PREVIEW GUIDE

Manhunt's manual tied in perfectly with the game.

take a while, so we wanted to provide the player with a manual that was entertaining as well as informative," says Tim Cain, *Fallout*'s creator. "We wanted to set the mood of the game for the player right away, so the manual was written as an actual survivor's guide for a vault dweller: someone who found himself surviving a nuclear war in one of the Vault-Tec shelters."

Fallout designer Chris Taylor wrote the manual's chapters and organised its structure, while the art team provided illustrations of Vault Boy weathering radiation, taking on mutants and misfiring guns. "All this work had to be done quickly, in a narrow window when the game features were complete, screenshots taken, and the game prepped for shipping," says Cain.

Fallout's manual paved the way for the pulpy, tongue-in-cheek, imagery behind the later games, including 2008's *Fallout 3*. "The manual explained the effects of a nuclear war, so the player had some idea of what to expect in the game, and much of this information was accurate as well as sobering," says Cain, "but it was also written humorously. We mention other publications, including *How to Eat Rat* and *Coping With Mr Virus*, so it seemed like one in a series of manuals from Vault-Tec. This let us set up *Fallout 2*, with its Garden of Eden Creation Kit (GECK), without raising any suspicions in the player."

Game manuals also had practical considerations. Pre-*Elite* games came in cassette boxes, with instructions on a printed insert. By Braben's own admission, *Elite* was complicated to play: nearly all the keys on a keyboard

Elite and *Fallout*'s manuals added depth to the games.

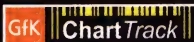


"The loveliness of the manual has migrated into the game"

David Braben, Creator, *Elite*

PCZONE Charts

Official data compiled by



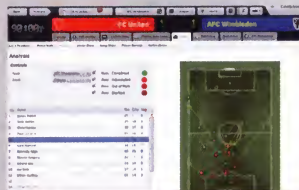
- 1 **NEW** **THE SIMS 3: AMBITIONS**
N/A
- 2 **FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010**
Issue 214 - 88%
- 3 **THE SIMS 3**
Issue 208 - 92%
- 4 **THE SIMS 3: WORLD ADVENTURES**
Issue 215 - 78%
- 5 **COMMAND & CONQUER 4: TIBERIAN TWILIGHT**
Issue 220 - 60%
- 6 **SUPREME COMMANDER 2**
Issue 219 - 80%
- 7 **MODERN WARFARE 2**
Issue 215 - 95%
- 8 **WORLD OF WARCRAFT: WRATH OF LICH KING**
Issue 202 - 86%
- 9 **BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2**
Issue 220 - 84%
- 10 **BIOSHOCK 2**
Issue 218 - 92%
- 11 **NEW** **THE WITCHER: ENHANCED EDITION - PLATINUM**
N/A
- 12 **MASS EFFECT 2**
Issue 218 - 93%
- 13 **RE** **FALLOUT 3: GAME OF THE YEAR EDITION**
N/A
- 14 **JUST CAUSE 2**
Issue 220 - 84%
- 15 **GTA: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY**
Issue 221 - 86%
- 16 **SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION**
Issue 221 - 84%
- 17 **LEFT 4 DEAD 2**
Issue 215 - 94%
- 18 **DAWN OF WAR II: CHAOS RISING**
Issue 220 - 90%
- 19 **EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR**
Issue 206 - 78%
- 20 **ASSASSIN'S CREED II**
Issue 219 - 90%



1. THE SIMS 3: AMBITIONS
The Sims 3's big ambition is for PC ZONE to say something nice about it. We say, it's good to have hope.



11. THE WITCHER: ENHANCED EDITION - PLATINUM
Why should you get this? One, it's an excellent game. Two, it's free of DRM.



2. FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
What, no World Cup edition? Well there's an obvious piece of branding that's been missed.



15. GTA: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY
If you like *Sons of Anarchy* or thought *Scarface* should be camper, get this.



Nice cod piece there Isaac.

CLARKE CONTROL

Visceral to fix mouse issues... sort of

WEBSITE deadspace.ea.com

WHILE WE LIKED *Dead Space* here at PC ZONE, there was no doubt that getting Isaac Clarke to turn around was like trying to drag a stubborn rhinoceros up a slope coated in polycement. In fact, the control system was so bad it was the main factor in *Dead Space* being so far off earning a coveted Classic award.

Now Steve Papoutsis, executive producer at Visceral, has said the studio has listened to the PC community and is going to ensure these problems don't arise in *Dead Space 2*, stating "that's something we have focused on trying to improve."

However, Papoutsis then went on to comment that "the way we're playing it is with a gamepad" and that PC gamers should "play the game with that."

Considering one of the main advantages of playing games on PC is the ability to play shooters with the accuracy of a keyboard and mouse, this is a bit like telling a squirrel it should use a ladder to climb trees. A cumbersome and unwieldy ladder that has a tendency to miss the tree entirely and needs some sort of auto attach system in order to function properly.

Still, fingers crossed Visceral mean what they say. The first bit anyway.

GAMES ON DEMAND

Microsoft to take on Steam

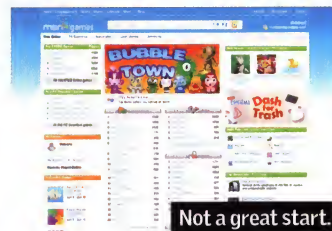
WEBSITE microsoft.com/games

DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION SERVICES are springing up across the internet. Microsoft have been pretty late too the party, having been kept busy fixing all the problems they created by trying to crowbar an Xbox 360 gaming platform onto the PC.

However, they've recently announced that their own fledgling distribution service *Games on Demand* will be adding games that don't require *Games for Windows Live* to run from studios like 2K, Rockstar, THQ and Capcom.

Microsoft are looking to release new titles every week, aiming for 100 games to be available for download by the end of the year.

Clearly there's a long way to go before *Games on Demand* could be



Not a great start.

considered serious competition to established digital distribution behemoths like *Steam* and *Direct2Drive*. And whether they'll be able to keep up with the generally excellent pricing and sales of the aforementioned systems remains very much open to query.

Nevertheless, if anybody has the resources to make *Games on Demand* a success, it's Microsoft.

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Incoming

How you'll be wasting your money in 2010

WITH E3 COMES new games and new entries for our bloated release schedule. Some of the highlights include the third *Fable* game (any chance of the second one, Lionhead?) and the new *XCOM*, which is splitting the gaming community in half as they argue about whether or not it's worthy of the series.

If '50s alien blobs aren't being dunked in your cup of tea though, perhaps you'll notice the subject of our extensive first look, *Homefront*, nestling nicely in the middle of the pack as well. It's probably got the dumbest plot of all time, but sometimes stupid things can be good. Take Wayne Rooney, for example.

MAFIA II

Seven years since it's release and gaming's greatest gangster epic is only a couple of months away from getting the sequel it deserves. It's become clear that 2K Czech aren't trying to provide an entirely new experience than a bigger, better and more streamlined game that fixes the original's problems, while retaining the *Mafia* hallmarks of sweeping story, colourful characters and blistering shoot outs.

Mafia II isn't out to change the world, but it intends to make the world a better place

by taking a fantastic game and polishing it to the point where if it catches the sun it will likely burn out your retinas.



TWO WORLDS II

Few would argue that the first *Two Worlds* wasn't dire. Badly written and voiced with a combat system that made swinging a sword feel like swinging a small factory, it attempted to do *Oblivion* on a shoestring budget and failed miserably.

With the second game developers TopWare have taken onboard the criticism of the first game, and so the sequel looks very promising. Aside from the gorgeous new engine, new combat system, improved AI and a story which is being written by native

English speakers, rather than being translated, means that *Two Worlds: The Temptation* has a chance of stealing Bethesda's open-world fantasy crown.



AHEAD OF THE GAME

Take heed readers - this is how excited we are over the biggest games that are coming out of the next 12 months.

GAME	PUBLISHER	ETA
NEED FOR SPEED: WORLD	EA	13 JULY
PENUMBRA COLLECTION	PARADOX	23 JULY
STARCraft II: WINGS OF LIBERTY	BLIZZARD	27 JULY
TOY STORY 3	DISNEY	30 JULY
KANE & LYNCH 2: DOG DAYS	EIDOS	27 AUG
MAFIA II	2K GAMES	27 AUG
SHIP SIMULATOR 2010: EXTREMES	PARADOX	27 AUG
SPELLFORCE 2: FAITH IN DESTINY	JOWOOD	27 AUG
THE PATRICIAN IV	KALYPSO MEDIA	27 AUG
AMNESIA: THE DARK DESCENT	FRACTIONAL	AUGUST 2010
MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHEUCK'S REVENGE SE	LUCASARTS	SUMMER 2010
DEAD RISING 2	CAPCOM	3 SEPT
R.U.S.E.	UBISOFT	3 SEPT
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATAclysm	ACTIVISION	3 SEPT
FRONT MISSION EVOLVED	SQUARE ENIX	17 SEPT
TWO WORLDS II	ZUXXEZ	17 SEPT
TRUE CRIME	ACTIVISION	21 SEPT
METAL GEAR SOLID: RISING	KONAMI	23 SEPT
ARCANIA: GOTHIC 4	JOWOOD	24 SEPT
CIVILIZATION V	2K GAMES	24 SEPT



DC UNIVERSE ONLINE	SONY ONLINE	24 SEPT
F1 2010	CODEMASTERS	24 SEPT
LOST PLANET 2	CAPCOM	24 SEPT
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED 2	NAMCO BANDAI	24 SEPT
GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER	UBISOFT	1 OCT
MAX PAYNE 3	ROCKSTAR	1 OCT
MEDAL OF HONOR	EA	15 OCT
STAR WARS: FORCE UNLEASHED 2	LUCASARTS	26 OCT
STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC	LUCASARTS	28 OCT
THIEF 4	EIDOS	28 OCT
FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS	BETHESDA	29 OCT
CRYSIS 2	EA	AUTUMN 2010
FABLE III	MICROSOFT	AUTUMN 2010
F.E.A.R. 3	WARNER	AUTUMN 2010
STORM OF WAR	UBISOFT	1 NOV
TRON: EVOLUTION	DISNEY	1 NOV
CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS	ACTIVISION	9 NOV
RAGE	BETHESDA	12 NOV
ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD	UBISOFT	16 NOV
NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT	EA	16 NOV
BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2 - VIETNAM	EA	WINTER 2010
DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO	UBISOFT	WINTER 2010
HITMAN 5	SQUARE ENIX	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM	BLIZZARD	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOICE	BLIZZARD	WINTER 2010
THE AGENCY: COVERT OPS	SOE	TBA 2010
ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES	SEGA	TBA 2010
BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2	WARNER BROS	TBA 2010
CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION	BOHEMIA	TBA 2010
SPEC OPS: THE LINE	2K GAMES	TBA 2010
DEAD SPACE 2	EA	28 JAN

CRYSIS 2

PC gamers worldwide unleashed a synchronised groan of despair when CryTek announced that *Crysis 2* would be the end for the series' PC exclusivity.



But with the game readying for a November release, it's new-look New York clothing fitting astonishingly well into the game's less demanding, but still beautiful engine, a revamped nanosuit giving the player new and more powerful abilities, and the promise of more free-form combat, *Crysis 2* is looking sweeter than a Radeon HD5970 card drenched in maple syrup and purple Smarties.

And fighting the aliens promises to be awesome this time. Trust us.

FABLE III

So, Mr Molyneux, you've come crawling back have you? We knew you would recant your console heresy. Wait, you haven't? Ah, but you've deemed *Fable*

III worthy of a PC release? Well, it's a start at least.

Gaming's number one hyperbole merchant is looking to tear-up the rule book established in the first two *Fable* games (or one, if you're a dedicated PC gamer). Rather than the game ending as you reach the zenith of your abilities, you'll be able to become ruler of Albion and the regions far beyond it's borders. Hopefully *Fable III* will mark the re-ignition of Molyneux's roller coaster love affair with the PC.



BRINK	BETHESDA	EARLY 2011
THE SECRET WORLD	FUNCOM	EARLY 2011
DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION	EIDOS	SPRING 2011
HOMEFRONT	THQ	SPRING 2011
LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR IN THE NORTH	DISNEY	SPRING 2011
PROJECT DUST	UBISOFT	SPRING 2011
SHOGUN 2: TOTAL WAR	SEGA	SPRING 2011
THE WITCHER 2: ASSASSIN'S OF KINGS	NAMCO BANDAI	SPRING 2011
PORTAL 2	VALVE	WINTER 2011
XCOM	PARADOX	WINTER 2011
BULLETSTORM	EA	TBA 2011
DIABLO III	ACTIVISION	TBA 2011
WARHAMMER 40,000: THE DARK MILLENNIUM	THQ	TBA 2012



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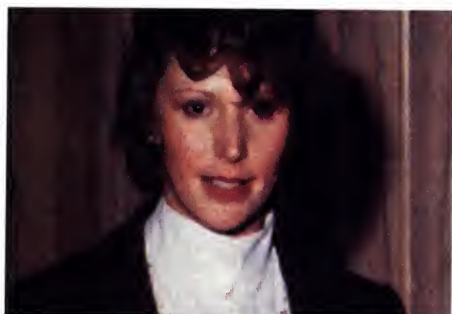
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Some of the sights from previous Joysticks: Chris Tarrant and a bunch of people trapped in time, Wossy and Dave Woods, Lee Nutter and Justin Lee Collins, and lovely David Mitchell.

YOUR GAMES NEED YOU

Shortlist voting open for this year's Golden Joystick Awards

WANT TO SEE your favourite games get the recognition they deserve? Well there's no better way to show your support than by voting for them in the world's biggest gaming awards, the Golden Joysticks.

Some 270,000 votes were cast across the 16 categories during the long list stage. Now things have got serious with the opening of the shortlist at goldenjoystick.com.

You can find the full list of games that made the shortlist on the site and there are loads of titles representing the PC.

The wonderful *World Of Goo* has to be a shoe-in for Puzzle Game Of The Year, we're backing *Football Manager 2010* in Sports, and *Mass Effect 2* is sure to clean up in both the RPG and Ultimate Game Of The Year categories. There are plenty more crackers, too.

You've got until October to vote, and you can vote in as many or as few categories as you like, but why wait? We've cast our votes already. Go, go *Mass Effect 2*!

Now we can sit back and wait for a big cheque from BioWare. **PC!**



Vote for *Mass Effect 2*, or he'll be really pissed.

BEST IN SHOW

Some of the games you can vote on

PUZZLE GAME OF THE YEAR

- BRAIN EXERCISE WITH DR KAWASHIMA
- LUXOR: MAH JONG
- WORLD OF GOO

SPORTS GAME OF THE YEAR

- BLOOD BOWL
- FIFA 10
- FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
- PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010

RPG OF THE YEAR

- DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS
- DRAGON AGE: AWAKENING
- FALLOUT 3: GAME OF THE YEAR
- MASS EFFECT 2
- RISEN
- TORCHLIGHT

ULTIMATE GAME OF THE YEAR

- AION: THE TOWER OF ETERNITY
- ASSASSIN'S CREED 2
- BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
- BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2
- MODERN WARFARE 2
- DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS
- FALLOUT 3: GAME OF THE YEAR
- FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
- LEFT 4 DEAD 2
- MASS EFFECT 2
- METRO 2033
- PLANTS VS ZOMBIES
- S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: CALL OF PRIPYAT

To vote visit computerandvideogames.com/joystick/shortlist.php



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JON 'LOG' BLYTH...

I WIN, I WIN AT PC ZONE!



As this is Steve's last month as editor, I am officially the longest-serving member of the team. With this awesome title comes power; power I intend to wield illogically and without measure, despite the meek protestations from fellow staff, publishers and even perhaps you, the reader.

"But you're freelance," you might say. "You chose to swap the power ladder for the luxury of constant low-level stress and increasingly unconvincing jokes about wanking too much."

I'm sorry, I can't hear you through the huge crown I've lowered onto my head.

"But other freelancers have a longer heritage at *ZONE*," you might continue. "Like Steve Hill. And frankly he's got a better way with words."

You can see I'm still wearing the crown. Why are you even talking to me?

So, here are the changes I'm making. If you don't like them, belch your complaints into a hat box, and put it in the airing cupboard. I'll pick them up when I'm in your neighbourhood.

1. TAKE THE BATTLE TO THE WEB

Magazines have long wrestled with the immediacy of the internet. So, to make sure that *PC ZONE* is a constantly updated barrage of information, we back up the magazine with pamphlets mailed to our readers. If something particularly shocking happens that you need to know about, we'll write it on a Post-It note, take a photo and email it to you.

2. OVER 100 PAGES OF SEX

It's well-established tradition to endorse technology by getting a nude model to hold it. Men seeing the woman will imagine long and mutual conversations about GPS technology, buy the magazine in an aroused trance, then go home and drag their squeaky fingers across the glossy cover, voicing both parts of the conversation they imagined earlier.

PC ZONE is going to build on that idea, and have more tits and cocks than could ever be justified or explained. Already we get 18 certificates, because children need to be shielded from words "tits" and "cock". So, we're halfway there – all I have to do is clear a one-off expenses claim for a sexy mansion in LA, and we're away.

3. START A NEW MAGAZINE WAR

PC Gamer aren't the enemy they once were. Both mags have transformed into beautiful caterpillars since the '90s, and nowadays when we meet at events we give each other back rubs. In fact, the highlight of the *ZONE* calendar is the annual *ZONE* vs *Gamer* tickling competition, where we all tumble to the floor and try to decide whether we're making out of not.

If you want to enter into a debate with this professional opinion stater, you can contact Log by the methods below.

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

✉ Mr Log, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW



"I can't hear you through the huge crown I've lowered onto my head"

I was never around for the era of corporate espionage, editorial backstabbing, and poisonous double-dealing – but it sounded amazing. So, my first act as someone pretending to have an iota of power will be to write a letter to *PC Pro*, saying I've had their birds, and what are they going to do about it.

4. WELCOME PLEASE, THE TRAMP'S HANKY

Scores. Who wants them? Well, Metacritic want them, it's what they do. And publishers, they want them because they operate on a plane of numbers and spreadsheets. PR people want them of course, because they're a measure of how effective their PR campaigns were. And you want them, because they're convenient.

But I don't want them, so I'm replacing them with the tramp's hanky. Every game will end not with a score, but with a picture of a homeless man offering you the contents of his handkerchief. Inside it will be an item designed to provoke the emotion most appropriate to the game. Bad items will include a bloody dog's tooth or a dirty ballet shoe – good things will include a £10 winning scratch card and a little pot of sherbet.

That's my plan, anyway. If none of it happens, then you should all know that I did my best. And come 2027, when we're all discussing the shiny trail of mucus that was awarded to *Assassin's Creed 9*, you'll finally understand that I was right. **PCZ**



AS THE WORLD Cup draws to a close, the status of its most valued players is certain to soar. But taking part in the beautiful game on the world stage isn't the only way to achieve adulation and recognition. If you missed out on taking part in the *Football Superstars* PMC World Cup, there's another opportunity to make your mark. Two of the biggest gaming websites, CVG.co.uk and Gamesradar.com will go head to head – and they need you to make it happen.

Take your player through the ranks and see them reach their pinnacle as they achieve celebrity status by training, winning games and being interviewed by journalists. You will receive free boots to get you started, crafting your character as well as your skills.

Everything you need to become a football legend for either GamesRadar or CVG is at your disposal; computer-controlled coaches, top of the range

training facilities and a gym where you can trade your money to enhance your pace and agility are just a few of the beneficial options available. Hone your skills, learn to control your player and develop your passing, tackling and shooting as you rise through the ranks. Once your player is created, you enter the game in a city where footballer's dreams are made.

The modern-day superstar aspect of players is represented through the opportunity to earn Fame Points. Not content with merely perfecting the

game, you'll also be able to purchase high-end clothes from the city's boutiques, dine in the finest restaurants and trade experience for newspaper, radio and TV interviews. Your Fame Points will in turn determine the amount of money you gain for each match, enabling you to go from lowly paid apprentice to high flying star player. Perhaps the most rewarding part of the journey is that you only control the player you created, as opposed to controlling all players. Your player is unique to you since every other player

on the pitch is controlled by another person. Not only are you battling against another team but you're also competing against teammates for money and experience that unlock new skills. This makes the hard work all the more satisfying as you witness your player's rise to football greatness.

Football Superstars is an innovation; it's the first virtual football world. It's also the most competitive football experience on the planet, where team work, skill and focus all combine to recreate the beautiful game on your PC.

WHICH TEAM WILL YOU CHOOSE?

JOIN UP NOW, REPRESENT AND BECOME A FOOTBALL SUPERSTAR! All players signing up with Gamesradar or CVG will receive a bonus welcome pack including some in game money (FS bonds), a pair of performance boots, and some fancy clothing for your superstar. What are you waiting for?

TEAM CVG

BY JOINING TEAM CVG, you will not only be entitled to your welcome pack but will also receive a pair of Puma v1.08 football boots for your player, available exclusively to CVG players. In addition, you will receive a Tiger Mascot suit plus 5 FS Bonds to get you started. Sign up for team CVG today! Please note, colours may vary.



TEAM GAMESRADAR

PLAY FOR THE GamesRadar team and when you get your welcome pack you'll also receive a pair of Reebok Valde Pro football boots for your player, as well as 5 FS points and a Lion Mascot suit. This offer is exclusive to members of the GamesRadar team and will help you become the player you need to be. Join team GamesRadar now! Please note, colours may



To get signed up right now, visit either: cvg.co.uk/footballsUPERSTARS or gamesradar.com/footballsUPERSTARS



CEVAT YERLI
CEO, CRYTEK

Matt Hill talks to Crytek's head, and asks whether German government censorship is going to force his company to move country

CENSORING

LAST YEAR Cevat Yerli – the man behind Germany's biggest developer, Crytek – threatened to quit the country if its government banned violent games.

One online petition, 73,000 signatures and a governmental climb-down later, Yerli remains a German citizen. But with Switzerland and Venezuela pushing through similar bans recently, and the UK looking again at its ratings system, the story is not over.

Q Are you happy the German government's ban failed?

A The discussions didn't go through Congress, but it will inevitably come round again. But we are not letting it affect our business. We're moving forward as much as we can, as fast as we can.

Would Crytek really leave Germany if such a law was passed?

I'm a big fan of controlling our own destiny, and if anything would hurt that, we'd see what we could do and where we could live. Frankly speaking, what

would you do if people censored certain aspects of your core business? It's not a choice: they would've forced us to leave the country.

This is a matter of rational reaction and supporting our core beliefs. We want to push the boundaries and we'd go where we'd be allowed to do that. We are working in the interest of all gaming fans and a lot of businesses with our game engines, and we want to continue delivering on that. If Germany would prevent us, or limit us in these aspects, we wouldn't accept it.

You're not just based in Frankfurt, though: you have studios in the UK, Hungary, Bulgaria and Ukraine. You could say Germany needs you more than you need it.

I wouldn't want to say that, but Germany has to deal with that assessment. We are the country's biggest developer and as worldwide recognition goes, I think we're one of the few that has an international reputation. But we're not bound to Germany – we're weren't born there.

I'm myself wasn't born there, and I'd love to continue where I am, but much of the company isn't based in Germany, so it wouldn't be very complicated for us to move.

Computer games now outsell films and music. A typical dividend return on a hit game is 10:1 or 12:1; while on a hit movie it's 5:1 or 6:1, maybe 8:1 if it's *Avatar*. But that's still less than the games industry – even average games have a hit rate of 3:1. The efficiencies are naturally better, the industry just needs to be more transparent to draw investors in. This success is something we should be proud of, so it's bizarre that the German government would be actively unsupportive of such a booming and lucrative industry. It's a very strange attitude.

Does the German government not want some of that money?

It seems like it's an intentional, "Let's do everything we can to not jump on the train" activity.

In many other countries videogame developers are supported tremendously, but I sometimes say, "How the hell did we end up in Germany?" because there are so many obstacles, so many problems we're facing day-by-day. I wonder what is keeping us there and I'm running out of reasons.

Germany should be trying to keep us – there are a lot of young developers that go out of university to foreign countries to work on games because they're afraid they could lose their job because of the government.

Isn't some kind of rating system necessary, to keep games for adults from being played by young kids?

The whole ratings aspect of games is a sensitive topic. The kind of games that are successful are unfortunately also accessed by young audiences that shouldn't access them. And because certain points in the sales chain aren't taken care of well enough – parents don't take care, shops don't take care – the root of the creation is criticised.

If our games get in the hands of young kids, which I don't approve of, why should we be made responsible for this? What the German government proposed to do was censor this activity by saying we shouldn't allow the sales or development of any game that is rated Mature, preventing and classifying them so a large section of successful franchises wouldn't be available. But developers want to be part of the gaming culture and will just leave if that happens. They'll go work on *Call of Duty* or whatever in the US and the UK where they're not limited.

"Much of the company isn't based in Germany, so it wouldn't be very complicated for us to move"



THE CENSORS

"It's bizarre that the German government would be unsupportive of such a lucrative industry"



Steve interviews a photo of Sid Meier.

PCZONE **NOT** AT E3

Admiring the Fame'd Worlde Games Faire, from afar!

Phwee! It's that time of year again folks, when everybody who's anybody turns their attention to the biggest games expo on the planet: **EEE**, or **E3**.

This year, PC developers stopped just short of announcing precisely nothing, handing over about 20 pictures of games we already knew about, while Microsoft and Sony desperately tried to do exactly as Nintendo did last year to find another fortune, like some shiny plastic, arm-waving cult.

Things weren't all move-this, wave-that and jiggle-the-other though, so here's a round-up of the most interesting bits from E3 – not from the show floor, but from the **PC ZONE** office, which is where we were while our freelancers got to have all the fun.



DRIVER: SAN FRANCISCO

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Reflections **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **ETA** Winter 2010

THE STORY TO *Driver: San Francisco* has a very odd premise. The character Tanner from the first game turns up, but he's in a coma and that's where the game seems to be played out. It's a strange one, certainly.

Other than that, Charles Jericho from *Driver 2* is in there, as are cars, crashes and a whole lot of *Bullit*. One hundred licensed vehicles will be included to chase about in, but that's about it, info-wise, on that one.

Are you allowed to drive in a coma?



See what joys we missed out on?



Look carefully and you won't see PC ZONE.

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal PUBLISHER Ubisoft ETA 16 November

THIS IS A remarkably speedy bit of sequelising. *Assassin's Creed: Brotherhood* will feature a gang of young hoods working under Ezio's command. This should form some part of the single-player game, which should run along similar lines to the previous game.

There's also the promised multiplayer modes, of which only one has been revealed at the time of writing. Eight players at a time can take part in Wanted, which sees each player being assigned another one as their target for murdering. If you do well (ie keep killing before getting killed) and the game adjusts things accordingly. So if you get a good streak going on, you'll could find yourself hunted by half of the server.

Brotherhood will also have the, by now utterly generic, XP and customisable characters thing going on too, with rewards being doled out not just for mere kills, but for the style in which you perform them. You can also get XP by running away,

"And that's for saying I shop at Primark!"

The return of prog rock?

PROJECT DUST

DEVELOPER Ubisoft PUBLISHER Ubisoft ETA Spring 2011

UBISOFT REVEALED THE intriguing *Project Dust* at E3, which does indeed feature a lot of sand. It's also based on a fully dynamic world that can see bits of the scenery crumbling away underneath you at any time. You'll be able to play about with the environment too, digging craters, flooding valleys. The game's creator Eric Chahi, famous for his work on the classic platformer *Another World*, describes it as "the spiritual successor to *Populous*".

THE NOT-GOING-TO-E3 PARTY

Here, much of the games industry who were left behind during E3 congregated in a mutual drowning of sorrows.

Feelings of rejection were dissolved into a of beery paste, which a dejected Steve and David smeared over one another's prostrate forms. The evening culminated in a ritualistic burning of effigies of those who actually got to take the 10-hour trek to that damnable superheated pit of sweat and effort in Los Angeles.

But we're not bitter about being left behind. Oh they'd love if they were bitter, wouldn't they? That'd suit them just fine.

E3 had planes. We like planes.

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2 – VIETNAM

DEVELOPER DICE PUBLISHER EA ETA Winter 2010

NEW VEHICLES, WEAPONS and environments, all based on that little conflict in Vietnam. That's what's awaiting *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* players in what's being dubbed the 'DLC Sequel' to the shooter. Or console players at least, as we're told the PC version "will be announced later". So despite the fact more people are playing the game on PC, we're still getting stiffed. At least it'll come around eventually, unless there's a big turnaround.

The US Army strikes at the evil of thatch.



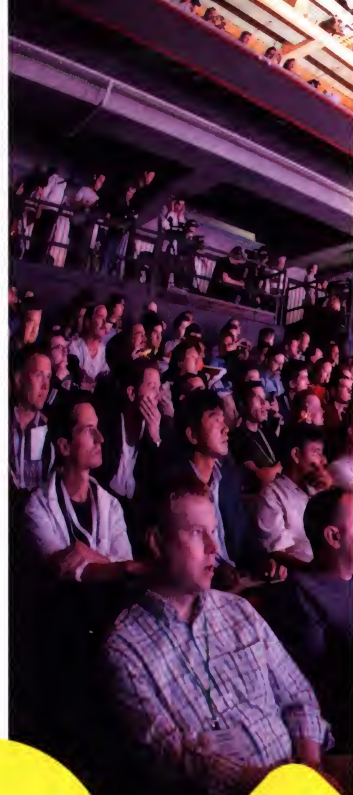
WD40: essential kit for Space Marines.

WARHAMMER 40,000: SPACE MARINE

DEVELOPER Relic PUBLISHER THQ ETA TBA

FANS OF TYRANIDS and power armour had a double treat at E3, with details on the *Warhammer 40,000* MMO and this FPS being handed out.

Space Marine is an action RPG leaning towards the *Gears of War* school of gaming. Small squads of Space Marines will shoot lots of orks and tyrannids, with big Titans occasionally stomping about. As Relic are doing it, it'll likely be more than an average blaster. We hope so, as the licence deserves a good shooter.



WE'RE SAVING THE WORLD
How not going to E3 made the planet a better place

By staying in London with our monitors tuned into E3, only leaving the office to attend exclusive "pre-E3" events made to make magazines look like they have a hope of delivering content as quickly as the internet, we've saved the planet. Don't believe us? Suck on these facts:

2.8 tonnes

Average CO₂ emission per passenger per return journey from Heathrow to Los Angeles' LAX airport.

0.06 tonnes

Average CO₂ emission required to run two laptops for 80 hours.

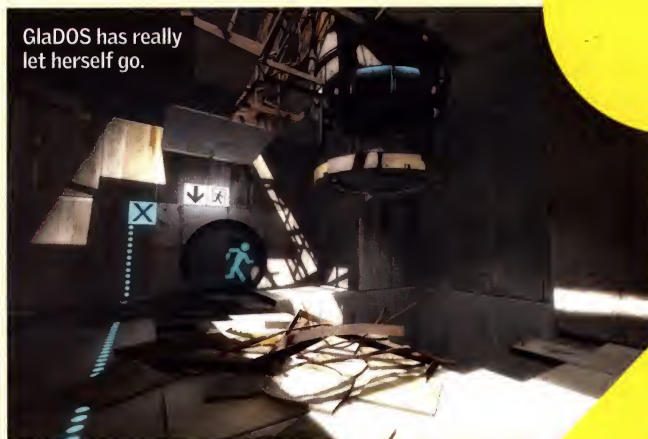
0.0024 tonnes

Average CO₂ emission required to create the 20 burgers we'd eat over there instead of real food.

0.00002 tonnes

Total CO₂ that we would've exhaled in all the amazement of E3.

You can't argue with facts – Earth would be utterly doomed had we gone to E3 this year. Those who went now have the blood of the planet on their hands, and as we all know, the planet's blood is molten magma, so that's going to sting.



GlaDOS has really let herself go.

PORTAL 2

DEVELOPER Valve PUBLISHER Valve ETA Winter 2011

AFTER A SERIES of teasers, *Portal 2* made its first proper introduction, with a few new nuggets of information dribbling from Gabe Newell's vocal orifice.

Other than re-confirming the plot and the existence of personality cores, some interesting puzzle elements were revealed. The Excursion Funnel is a mobile energy wave that can be stepped into, allowing the player to travel along the path the wave is going, and portals can be used to alter its path.

Other gadgets that were revealed were the Aerial Faith Plate, a powerful launch platform, plus a Thermal Discouragement Beam and the Pneumatic Diversity Vent. The former is an energy beam that needs to be connected to an opposing point, while the Vent is an offensive device that can be used to get rid of turrets by means of a huge vacuum-producing machine.



Don't you hate it when that happens?

Fable 3: another game we already knew about.



"This year, PC developers stopped just short of announcing nothing"



Who says the gaming industry is male dominated?



BIGGEST E3 DISASTERS

What went wrong during the show

COFFEE CALAMITY

Steve: "It's got to be the time I tried to get a cappuccino from the coffee machine, but no cup came out. I mean, the machine is built to cope in that situation, but there was some splashing going on. There were definitely some speckles around the coffee machine. Anyway I took a cup from the water cooler and tried it again. It was fine the second time."



EGREGIOUS ELEVATOR

Dave: "Say the words 'elevator trouble' to anybody who didn't get to go to E3 and works in this office, and they'll laugh and groan in equal measures. First, the back elevator wasn't working. That's fine, we think, we'll use the front one. Day two: both elevators are broken. So it's four days of trekking up and down stairs for us wankers! Jesus, it never ends!"



David's lust for Gabe Newell gets the better of him.

WARHAMMER 40,000: DARK MILLENNIUM ONLINE

DEVELOPER Vigil Games PUBLISHER THQ ETA Winter 2011

E3 WAS ALSO the venue for our first proper glimpse at the *Warhammer 40,000* MMO, which has now been given an obligatory pointless subtitle with "*Dark Millennium Online*."

The trailer makes it look all colourful and action-y, which could bode well for those hoping it won't just be a bog-standard grind-and-click-fest. Those big robots/stomping machines look pretty cool as well.

We've still got no real idea how's it going to pan out or what features might be included to differentiate it from all the other MMOs out there, but more will be being revealed at GamesCom later this year.



In a few years time you too can be an ork.

NEED FOR SPEED: HOT PURSUIT

DEVELOPER Criterion PUBLISHER EA ETA 16 November

CRITERION HAVE BEEN given the opportunity to develop the next iteration in the never-ending *Need for Speed* series.

Titled *Hot Pursuit*, the game hearkens back to the old days with the focus primarily being on cops versus robbers and online play.

As a cop, your cars will be powerful, faster and hard to damage, but you have to follow the rules of the road, while the robber (or racer, more accurately) will be breaking speed limits, dodging traffic and stuff like that.

As well as this, Autolog allows for you to share race records and so on with your buddies.



Joyriding's never been such fun.

INSANITY REIGNS...**F*CK****THE PC'S 15 MOST WONDERFULLY**

ONE OF THE many brilliant things about the PC is that you're not tied to the mainstream. Unless you're housed deep with the labyrinthine offices of the most far-flung

Activision studio, you're free from the shackles of commercial viability and you can make whatever the hell you deem fit.

This, of course, means a whole truckload of glorious ideas, realised in all their indie charm. Developers with day jobs aren't afraid to aggressively pursue their own vision without compromising a single byte. But sometimes, this level of freedom leads to something far darker, stranger, and often sinister: something only describable by dropping an F-bomb.

These are games which, for better or worse, will leave you with a vague feeling of unease. From the likes of a game deeply rooted in anatomical profanity to the intrinsically absurd, each will give you that gut-punch feeling of driving over a humpback bridge too quickly. At least three will make you nauseous. One will make you question your own sanity, albeit briefly.

The games here, whether shooters, adventures or platformers, are unique and bizarre and are brought together by their singular resistance to the norm. Some are bold and beautiful while others are just words on a screen. Some are rubbish. Some are great. A few deal with serious issues, while a few scream insanity to astonishing levels. But the one thing they have in common, the one thing that bonds this esoteric fraternity together, is that they're all well and truly fucked up.

This doesn't look like an ordinary bonfire.



"These are games which, for better or worse, will leave you with a vague feeling of unease"

FUCKED UP!

WEIRD GAMING ABERRATIONS

01 PATHOLOGIC

DEVELOPER ICE-PICK LODGE PUBLISHER MERIDIAN 4
WEBSITE PATHOLOGIC-GAME.COM

A SPRAWLING RUSSIAN town lost in time. Dizzying architecture that defies Newtonian physics. A pair of guards who wear the most hideous of masks. Brechtian theatre. A great big gap where the fourth wall should be.

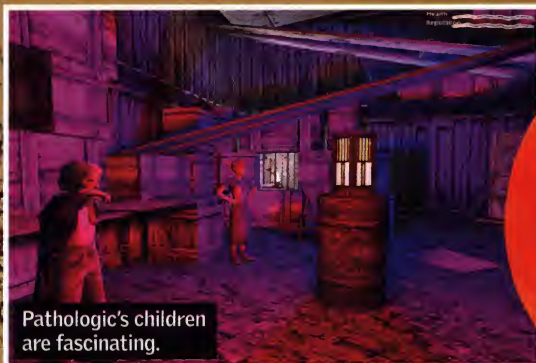
Pathologic doesn't do things by the book. It's a first-person action-RPG-adventure, set in the midst of an epidemic so terrible that even the buildings are diseased. The combat is atrocious, enemies lock on and charge until you go down, it looks like a game from the '90s, and the translated script is a garbled mess.

Yet that's exactly why *Pathologic* becomes one of the most sinister games on the planet. The fearlessness of the AI is truly frightening. The blocky visuals paint unnatural backdrops. None of the characters make any sense. You're stuck in a 12-day fever dream that, even though its length is predefined, you worry you might not ever wake up from.

"It's tragic and frightening. Disgusting, even," agrees Nikolay Dybowski, CEO of developer Ice-Pick Lodge. Yet despite the bleakness, Dybowski hopes there's a happier message to take from the game. "We believe the game is inspiring," he says, "because the player has the chance to overcome this cruel destiny."

That's only if you get to the end, though. In a game so stifling, it's a safe bet that many won't.

FUCKED UP MOMENT:
THE FIRST TIME YOU MEET THE TERRIFYING, BIRD-MASKED EXECUTORS, WHO GOVERN THE RULES OF THE GAME WORLD.



Pathologic's children are fascinating.

Words: Lewis Denby



02 ZENO CLASH

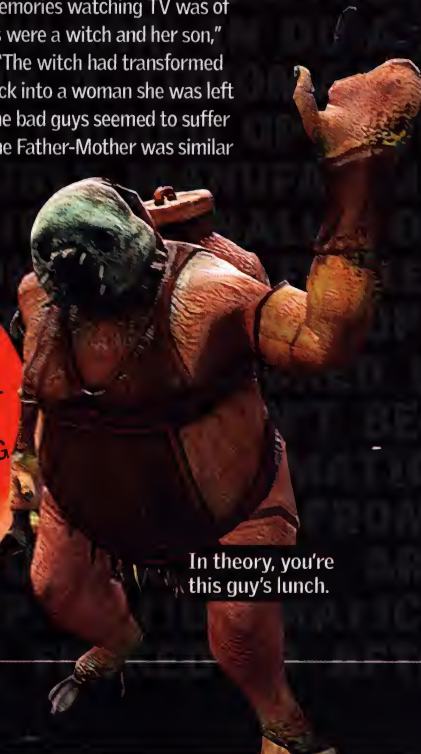
DEVELOPER ACE TEAM
PUBLISHER ACE TEAM
WEBSITE ZENOCASH.COM

THE ONLY WAY to describe *Zeno Clash* is 'surreal'. While its central mechanic – punching things in the face – is a pure joy, the game's lore touches upon some far darker subject matter. There's the Corwid of the Free, who aren't slaves to common sense so occasionally eat one another. There's the fighting trainer, who teaches you to aim by ripping the heads off chickens and telling you to shoot them before they die. There's the mystery of why the town's population is giving birth to pigs. It's rather insane.

All of this, coupled with a strikingly organic visual motif, lets you know *Zeno Clash* is out of the ordinary. But it's the moment you discover that the antagonist, Father-Mother, is a giant hermaphrodite bird-man-woman that you realise you're playing something with an imagination more twisted than a Gordian knot.

The inspiration? "One of my first memories watching TV was of a Sinbad movie where the antagonists were a witch and her son," recalls art director Edmundo Bordeu. "The witch had transformed into a seagull, but when she turned back into a woman she was left with bird legs. It impressed me that the bad guys seemed to suffer more misfortunes than the hero. For me Father-Mother was similar to this witch, and that's why I gave those weak bird legs to the powerful antagonist."

FUCKED UP MOMENT: ONE END-OF-CHAPTER BOSS, WHO APPEARS TWICE IN THE GAME, USES EXPLODING, PARACHUTING SQUIRRELS AS HIS PRIMARY WEAPON.



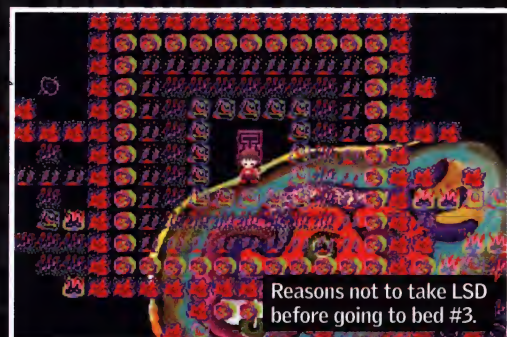
03 CUNT

DEVELOPER CRYPTIC SEA,
KOMIX GAMES
PUBLISHER NEWGROUNDS
WEBSITE BIT.LY/CUNT_GAME

YOU, A SMALL WILLY, versus an enormous vagina with a face and an STI. That's the concept of the webgame *Cunt*.

Co-creator Edmund McMillen claims he made the game to show that, as an independent developer, you can make pretty much anything without fear of censorship.

"This game contains graphic images of male and female genitalia," warns the rather aggressive loading screen. "If you can't deal with that, don't play this fucking game." Quite.



04 YUME NIKKI

DEVELOPER KIKIYAMA
WEBSITE BIT.LY/KIKIYAMA
(JAPANESE)

THIS TWISTED FREEWARE game from Japan tells the story of Madotsuki, a reclusive teenager who suffers from nightmares. You play through the nightmares, across a series of maze-like levels to collect a string of new powers.

Yume Nikki looks like a horrendous acid trip, made more even troubling by occasional flashes of something menacing – like the enormous, multicoloured penis caressing a handrail. And that's not even the strangest thing you'll see.

That's *Postal 2*'s sense of humour, right there.



05

POSTAL 2: SHARE THE PAIN

DEVELOPER RUNNING WITH SCISSORS
PUBLISHER WHIPTAIL INTERACTIVE
WEBSITE RUNNINGWITHSCISSORS.COM

ANY GAME IN which actor Gary Coleman plays a digitised version of himself is certain to raise an eyebrow. When that game is also one of the most astonishingly violent and, to some minds, gruesomely tasteless ever made, the other eyebrow heads north as well.

Postal 2 – this astoundingly brutal FPS sequel – doesn't seem to mind if it offends people. In it, you assume the role of The Postal Dude, Jr., a trailer park-dwelling maniac who must travel around town completing a host of mundane tasks. Violence is in fact optional throughout – but you're unlikely to meet many people who took the peaceful route.

Some have called it satire, while far more have cried "Whatchoo talkin' about?" in response. You'd think its place on a fucked up games list would be a given. But Running With Scissors' CEO Vince Desi disagrees:

"Our only goal is to make people laugh and be entertained," he objects. "As for 'fucked up', the only comment I have is that what's really fucked up is that the games industry is as corrupt as any other, including all parties, from publishers to retailers.

Just look at the bigotry the *Postal* brand has been subjected to. Can you tell me why other games that are more violent can get great ratings and wide distribution?" Yeah. Take that, games industry.

Weeeee! Literally.

FUCKED UP MOMENT:
 YOU CAN URINATE ON PEOPLE. HONEST TO GREAT GOODNESS, YOU CAN CHASE PEOPLE DOWN THE STREET WHILE URINATING ON THEM!

06 THE BARON

DEVELOPER VICTOR GIJSBERS
WEBSITE PLAYTHISTHING.COM/
 BARON

THE BARON
 An interactive story, written by Victor Gijbers and published under the GNU General Public License. New readers: PLEASE TYPE 'MENU' even if you are an experienced reader of interactive fiction. Release 1 / Serial number 000329 / Inform v6.30 Library G/11.5

The cave's vestibule
 This small rectangular hall has been chiseled from the rock by humans and covered with blackened bones and skulls, throwing flickering shadows southwards.

The most exciting grab of the issue.

EXPLAINING WHY THIS game is messed up without hitting spoiler territory is difficult. It's all in the ending, you see. Until then, *The Baron* is an

average text adventure about a man battling a dragon, who eventually faces an evil baron who's kidnapped his daughter.

But the dawning realisation that something's not all that it seems, before one final sucker-punch moment which presents you with a flabbergastingly unpleasant choice, makes this game memorable for the most disturbing of reasons.

07 PENUMBRA

DEVELOPER FRICTIONAL GAMES
PUBLISHER LEXICON ENTERTAINMENT
/PARADOX INTERACTIVE
WEBSITE PENUMBRAGAME.COM



Yeah, there's a problem with your canines.

"IT HELPS THAT everyone in the game is insane," says writer Tom Jubert of *Penumbra's* terror.

This episodic survival horror game

plays with some interesting interaction mechanics, but its main draw is how unnerving it is. When one section sees the level structure re-arrange behind your back, you know you're playing something that's hell-bent on confusing and intimidating you at every turn.

08 THE PATH

DEVELOPER TALE OF TALES
PUBLISHER TALE OF TALES
WEBSITE TALE-OF-TALES.COM/
 THEPATH

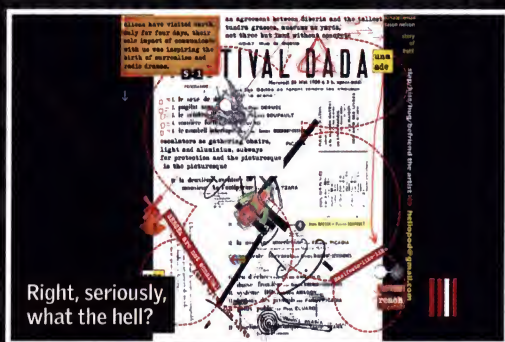


The game isn't always this summery.

WALK A LITTLE GIRL in red into the forest until she's ravaged by a wolf. Repeat until an entire group of siblings is no more. That's *The Path*

at its most basic, but there's more to it than that.

This artistic re-imagining of *Little Red Riding Hood* subverts gameplay norms and has some disturbing imagery. While there's no overt story beyond that of the original fairy tale, there are plenty of themes waiting to be interpreted by chin-scratchers.



09 EVIDENCE OF EVERYTHING EXPLODING

DEVELOPER JASON NELSON
WEBSITE SECRETTECHNOLOGY.COM/EXPLODE/EVERYTHING.HTML

"WHAT THE HELL?" That's the question likely to be on your mind while you navigate your way around *Evidence of Everything Exploding's* levels; levels constructed entirely out of scans of historical documents. Your enemies are words that attack on sight, and as you reach certain sections of a given maze, stuff has a tendency to blow up.

It's an "interactive poem" about conspiracies, apparently. That seems to translate as "completely mental".



10 LUGARU

DEVELOPER WOLFIRE GAMES
PUBLISHER WOLFIRE GAMES
WEBSITE WOLFIRE.COM/LUGARU

AWW, LOOK AT the ickle bunny rabbits. Look how they're stabbing each other with enormous swords and bleeding everywhere. Isn't it cute?

Yes, this is *Lugaru*, the bunny based fighting game. With plenty of gore and *Matrix*-style slow-motion, it's a surprisingly complex beat-'em-up with a bunch of smart moves.

Once you get into its story it's not as strange as you might expect, but it does remain a game about rabbits. Killing each other. All over the floor.



11 STALIN VS. MARTIANS

DEVELOPER BLACK WING FOUNDATION,
 DREAMLORE, N-GAME
PUBLISHER PARADOX INTERACTIVE
WEBSITE STALINVSMARTIANS.COM

IT'S A GAME called *Stalin vs Martians*. There. Job done. No more words necessary. Oh, go on, then. *Stalin vs Martians* is a game in which Josef Stalin enlists your help to take on hordes of multicoloured aliens ripped directly out of *Toy Story*. It's a real-time strategy that runs in fast-forward and contains no strategy whatsoever, and is utterly barmy.

This game isn't dark or particularly offensive once you realise it takes itself about as seriously as its name suggests. But its relentless obscurity makes it so unwaveringly weird that, just sometimes, it's a little bit uncomfortable.

"The initial idea of *Stalin vs Martians* came when the producers were drunk, but the concept was expanded when they were sober," explains Alexander Scherbakov, lead designer at Russian developer Dreamlore Games. "Since there's no difference between a drunk Russian and a sober one, *Stalin vs Martians* is a perfect example of a bizarre B-game – something so bad it's good."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, *Stalin vs Martians* was withdrawn from sale a few months after its release last year. There's an upgraded version on the way, says the official website. Should we be delighted or terrified?



FUCKED UP MOMENT:
 A FEW CRAZY MISSIONS IN, THE GAME PLAYS EURO-POP AND AN ANIMATED 3D STALIN APPEARS. AND DANCES. FOR SEVERAL MINUTES.



The end of the world, Korsakovia-style.

12 KORSAKOVIA

DEVELOPER DAN PINCHBECK **N-GAME**
WEBSITE THECHINESEROOM.CO.UK

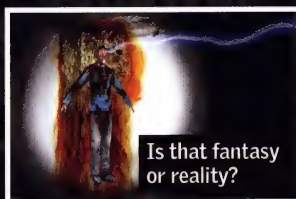
THIS MOD FOR *Half-Life 2*, made by University of Portsmouth researcher Dan Pinchbeck (creator of the bizarre *Dear Esther* mod), is one of the most disturbing game experiences around.

Set in a seemingly desolate mental institution, it tackles the topic of Korsakoff's Syndrome, a rare form of psychosis that renders sufferers unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality.

On the surface this is a first-person melee combat game. But that's the least remarkable thing about it. Your enemies are a swarm of smoke monsters who dart towards you at an alarming pace. Fragments of a conversation between your character and his doctor play out, enlightening and confusing in equal measure. And that's without even mentioning how the environment gradually dislocates around you, until eventually you're balancing on wooden planks above a never-ending void.

Pinchbeck has some strong opinions on how horror should be approached in games: "You have to take some risks," he says, "to deliberately and cruelly shove the player out of their comfort zone. If they can't relax into the normal expectation-action-reward loop, you're in business."

"*The Shining* isn't frightening because of Jack Nicholson with an axe. It's because every time Danny is pedalling around the corridors, he hits a corner and you have no idea whatsoever what's going to be around it."



Is that fantasy or reality?



Gravity-defying furniture features heavily.

FUCKED UP MOMENT:
AFTER YOU ASK WHY THE LIGHTS ARE OUT, THE DOCTOR SAYS: "THE PARAMEDICS WERE UNABLE TO FIND HIS EYES. WE THINK HE MAY HAVE EATEN THEM."

13 AMERICAN MCGEE'S ALICE

DEVELOPER ROGUE ENTERTAINMENT
PUBLISHER EA **WEBSITE** RETURNOFALICE.COM



Cheshire Cat, ready for the Goth night.

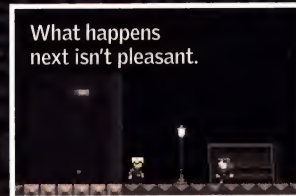
WHEN MOST PEOPLE read Lewis Carroll's famous story, it's a safe bet that they don't think about the limitless possibilities of decapitating card

guards. Thank goodness American McGee did, making *Alice* a gloriously macabre interpretation of Wonderland.

Alice is ostensibly a basic action-platformer spin on the classic kids' tale, but the thick Gothic stylings and tremendous ultra-violence make this about as suitable for children as a cigarette and a bottle of Jack Daniel's.

14 EDMUND

DEVELOPER PAUL GREASLEY
WEBSITE BIT.LY/EDMUNDGAME



What happens next isn't pleasant.

FEW GAMES ARE as uncomfortable to play as *Edmund*. This low-fi indie offers two levels, linked in an odd way. The first sees you running through the

fields of Vietnam, shooting on sight. The second, has you a man at a bus stop. When you begin to interact with the woman next to you, you realise you're about to do something horrific beyond words. Brave, intriguing and disturbing.

15 PSYCHONAUTS

DEVELOPER DOUBLE FINE PRODUCTIONS **PUBLISHER** THQ
WEBSITE PSYCHONAUTS.COM



What Chuckie from *The Rugrats* grew into.

MUCH HAS BEEN written about *Psychonauts'* weird ways, and there's a reason for that.

The game itself isn't too much out of the ordinary, being a slightly quirky platformer, but it differs itself by being set inside the thoroughly twisted minds of various other characters.

Battling bosses that represent people's inner turmoil, and collecting dog tags that match up with different types of emotional baggage, you'll probably find you laugh a lot at *Psychonauts*, but it's got some dark humour. **PCZ**

Those are legs,
not a tongue.

FRICTION BURNS...

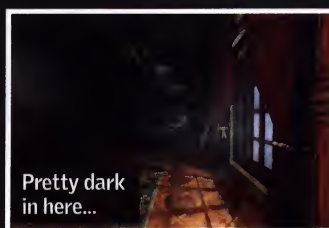
AMNESIA: THE DARK DESCENT

David Brown wakes up alone in a German castle

DEVELOPER Frictional Games **PUBLISHER** Frictional Games **WEBSITE** amnesiagame.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** issue 219

ONE OF THE things Frictional Games' Thomas Grip hates is modern games' over-reliance of killing things. "I like to play combat-focused games, but there's just too much killing at the core of most games," he told us back in issue 219.

If you think about it, he's correct. Take away our ability to resort to violence and we're helpless, which is why *Amnesia* doesn't have weapons. If you come across a hostile entity, you have to run away and hide. The most you could hope to achieve is to sting them a bit by lobbing books in their direction, but it's not going to do



Pretty dark
in here...

anything more than just give your position away and hasten your inevitable death.

You'll have to be thinking outside the box to outwit your enemies. Every time you see or hear something, you're desperately seeking the shadows or a hiding place, never knowing whether the footsteps you're hearing are an illusion or a genuine threat.

During our play test it did seem like there were too many noises that lead to nothing, which could lessen the feeling of tension if you end assuming hearing a noise means there won't be any danger. But that's something for

a review when the complete version of the game is released and we get access to the latter stages.

SCAREDY CAT

The early build we've managed to get access to is looking remarkably stable, considering that it's being produced by a small indie development team.

Frictional's *Penumbra* games were very well designed, and *Amnesia* doesn't look like bucking that

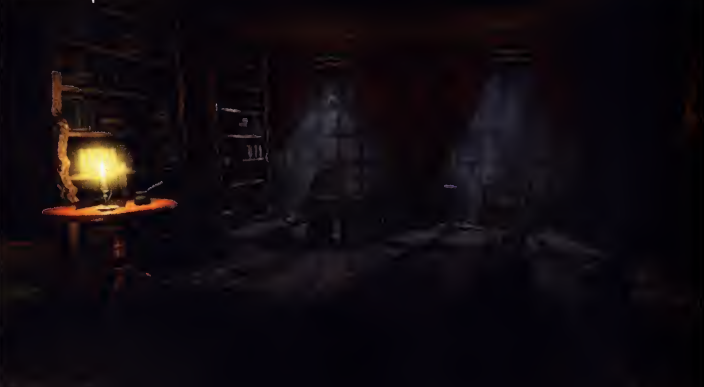
particular trend. Just like Frictional's first games, you're put into the game with little real knowledge of your surroundings and as an ordinary man, not an ass-kicking superhero. Like many games with Lovecraftian themes, your character's sanity plays a big role in the proceedings, because you're just a normal person being thrust into an otherworldly experience.

This game sees you taking the role of a normal guy who finds himself in a

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Scary
- ✓ Physics puzzles
- ✓ Uses sound very well
- ✓ Interesting back story
- ✓ No combat...
- ✗ ...which might annoy some.

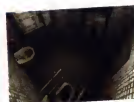
...and in here. Could
this be a pattern?





OVERTURE

Frictional's premiere mixed physics with scary action.



BLACK PLAGUE

Built on what *Overture* did good and fixed what it didn't.



REQUIEM

Had too many convoluted puzzles and a bad engine.



AMNESIA

Frictional takes you to the depths of darkest Germania.

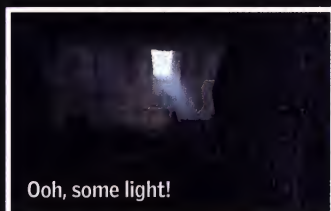
2007

2008

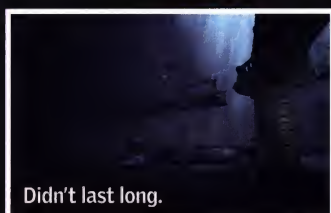
2008

2010

"Amnesia pushes horror buttons that few games seem to do through psychological trickery"



Ooh, some light!



Didn't last long.



Fancy a burger?

19th century German mansion, a crumbling abode that changes as you move through it. Frictional have tried to inject their setting with a real history, plenty of scrawled notes and flashbacks filling in the backstory, that's deliberately vague due of the familiar lost memory ploy. Gradually, you piece together what you're doing in the castle, what happened before you got there, and why There are

grotesque abominations trying to tear you limb from limb.

Amnesia also follows along the familiar path of Frictional's previous games by pushing the physics puzzle heavily, only this time there aren't any keypads or electronic devices. Grip has spoken many times of the intriguing possibilities and challenges present in not being able to just use the stock 'find a keycard' puzzles developers

resort to. Instead, everything's gears and pulleys. As well as having to click, hold and drag to simulate the pulling out of a drawer, the puzzles involve similar mouse manipulation, turning in circles to use wheels, pulling down on levers and so on.

MADE YOU JUMP

The puzzles serve as a little respite from the continuously foreboding atmosphere, which looks to get more grim and grinding as the game reaches its climax.

Certainly, *Amnesia* pushes horror buttons that few games seem to do through psychological trickery, rather than bludgeoning the player with "BOO!" moments. In fact, very few, if any, of these overused tricks employed. While there are moments when your view will suddenly dilate and your character will begin to panic, breathing heavily, it seems that these moments are down to environmental triggers and effects, rather than a monster jumping on your face from a cupboard. You'll be scared because of what might happen, rather than what is happening.

At this stage of the game's development, *Amnesia* seems every bit as good as the *Penumbra* series, with the added bonus of looking better. Perhaps it'll be able to attract a broader audience because of the good will and reputation Frictional have built up since *Overture* appeared.

Now, I would tell you more about the game, but I seem to have forgotten what I was going to say. Strange... **PCZ**

YOU UTTER, UTTER BEAST

Just one of the horrors that await you in the castle's depths



If you don't clear this in one, you're dead.

As sanity plays such a large role in the game, it would be wise to avoid looking at grotesque abominations, but how do you avoid looking at something you can't see?

Step down into the sewers and you'll meet up against an enemy that helps showcase both the sanity and the physics

elements of the games at once. For a start, it's invisible, so you don't know what's going on at first as you hear noises and see objects in the water move. That is until your flesh is rent from your bones.

Once you've figured out splashing about in the water attracts it, you can hop

from box to box, chucking rotting limbs into the gunge to lure it away, before making a mad dash for the exit.

Things are brilliantly tense and scary when it chases after you, especially as you fumble with doors, trying to close them to slow the enemy down for a split second.



CARS A PLENTY...

ETA
13 JULY
2010

NEED FOR SPEED: WORLD

Steve Hill drove all night to get to you, to make love to you...

DEVELOPER EA PUBLISHER Black Box WEBSITE world.needforspeed.com PREVIOUSLY IN... Issue 222

HERE'S A TERRIFYING thought: the *Need For Speed* series has been around for 16 years. Spookily, seconds after writing that sentence, a press release appeared in my inbox for *Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit*, developed by Criterion, some eight years after Black Box made its sequel. This is confusing, so listen carefully: four years ago, Black Box made the half-decent *NFS: Carbon*, a pseudo-open world affair, the core engine of which is being used for *NFS: World*, a game that represents the series' opening foray into the massively multiplayer online space.

This is that most rare of genres: a driving-based MMO. As such it comes with all the trappings of traditional MMOs – levelling, guilds (of sorts),

personalisation and socialisation, all wrapped in shiny graphics and accessible gameplay. It may use a four year-old engine, but the game's been worked on for some time, and the cars, features and world have all been refreshed. Black Box don't want to leave anybody out, so its

I tried the beta on an ancient laptop, and while it ran, it wasn't exactly fun. Upstairs on my monster gaming PC from Alienware *World* was a different matter, boasting an instantly familiar *Need For Speed* look and feel, with the keyboard proving perfectly functional during a few

each of which has specific power-ups – kind of like *Blur* (page 80).

For instance, if you specialise in Races, you'll be looking to stock up on Nitrous, and maybe a bit of Slingshot, which enables you to instantly catch up to the car in front. If you like getting chased by the cops, an Emergency Evade power-up flips any nearby cars into the air, and the Juggernaut rams anyone out

"Comes with all the trappings of MMOs"

team is optimising down to netbooks and up to new graphics slingers. So will anybody will be able to play *World*?

"That is the ultimate goal," says producer Jesse Abney. "The bottom of the barrel to the very top."

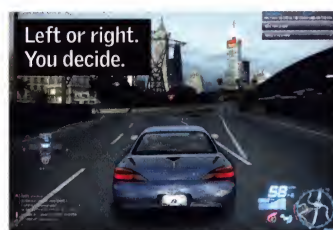
hours tearing round what looked like San Francisco. As Abney says, "This is a level of quality that has never before been seen in a free online game."

FREE-TO-PLAYISH

When Abney says *World* is free, it's not strictly true. Technically it is, but you will eventually reach a point at which micro-transactions are the only way you'll be able to progress. These will enable you to buy – or rent – new cars, and crucially stock up on power-ups. It's these modifiers that largely define the three 'classes' – Race, Explore and Pursuit –

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Classic *Need For Speed*
- ✓ Instantly playable
- ✓ A goblin-free MMO
- ✓ It's free...
- ✗ ...sort of
- ✗ Needs a powerful PC



THE STORY SO FAR...
NEED FOR SPEED



THE NEED FOR SPEED
Series launches with the definitive article.

1994



NFS: HOT PURSUIT 2
Rebranded EA Black Box makes their debut with the sixth *Need for Speed*.

2002



NFS: CARBON
A team-based open-world affair that sows the seed...

2006



NFS: WORLD
...of the game you see below. Looks promising, but will it work?

2010



THIS IS NOT THE END

Some smart arse once said that art is never finished, only abandoned. Thankfully *Need For Speed: World* developer EA Black Box is in for the long haul.

"We never want to say this is the final game," says producer Jesse Abney. "To us that's not what an MMO should be. We own PC space, we own the release methodology (digital download), and we engage the community in order to derive their feedback much more immediately. So by being agile in that respect, we're able to engage, iterate, release; engage, iterate, release..."

He kept saying it until I walked away. I forgot to ask him to put some canyon duel races from *Carbon* in. If you're reading this Abney, do that.



A shield protects you from the buses.



That would appear to be Chinatown.

of the way, including the roadblocks that will spring up.

As you may have guessed, this isn't a hardcore driving simulation. It's even more arcade-oriented than previous *NFS* titles it's all about action. There are even scripted demolition events that enable you to cause mass damage (à la *Split/Second* – issue 222, 79%) while increasing your reputation.

SHADES OF MARIO

As for the races, they can be entered by driving to the starting hub or simply by clicking on the world map. While online multiplayer racing is *World's* focus, there are also single-player races against AI opponents that can also reward you in terms of cash and reputation. And even if you're piss-poor you can still acquire a random power-up through a lottery system in which you click on one

of five facedown cards at the end of a race.

Teams (guilds) can be formed, each with their own distinctive look. "Guilds require representation, individuality and livery," says Abner. "We enable them to organically create a hive mind."

While hardcore *Need For Speed* fans will want to buy the best, fastest cars, it does seem as if the game will also cater for Sunday drivers and lunchtime dabblers. Indeed, it's already being integrated with Facebook and other tedious social networks, so you can invite your pretend friends to drive a pretend car around a pretend world.

With only the forthcoming *Test Drive Unlimited 2* competing for online driving space, *NFS: World* would appear to have the heritage to carve out a sizable niche, particularly among those who like winding up the old bill. **PC7**



Jeremy Clarkson's masturbatory fantasy.



Can you patch my rear windscreen?

Push off, pesky stormtroopers.



LET IT RIP...

STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED II

Steve Hill fulfils his destiny – he snogs his sister

DEVELOPER LucasArts PUBLISHER Activision WEBSITE unleashed2010.com

THE PC RELEASE of *The Force Unleashed* was something of an afterthought, but the game was considered a success, commercially at least, shifting a healthy seven million copies. Critically, opinion was split, some bemoaning the console approach – combos, quick time boss fights and bugs – while fanboys gripped their lightsabers at the giddy *Star Wars*-ness of it all.

Filling the gap between the utterly shit prequel trilogy and the proper one,

The Force Unleashed told the story of Darth Vader's secret apprentice, Starkiller (apparently Skywalker's prototype name), and his moral battle with the Force powers bestowed upon him by Vader.

A decent tale, the Writers Guild of America gave it an award for Outstanding Achievement in Writing for Videogames.

As the '*Unleashed*' part of its name suggests, Force powers are not used sparingly in *TFU*. Instead they're tossed around like rice at a wedding.

Never mind balancing a few rocks or making lightsabers float about,

Starkiller could bring down Star Destroyers with his bare mind. If Alec Guinness were in *TFU*, he wouldn't have subtly informed those stormtroopers that C-3PO and R2-D2 weren't the droids they were looking for. He'd have twatted them with a lightning bolt before tearing Mos Eisley apart in a Jedi rampage.

SPOILER ALERT

While the success of *TFU* always suggested a sequel, those who completed the original may be



The atmosphere was electric.

surprised to learn of the return of its lead character Starkiller. His being dead presented something of a challenge for the writers.

"I think the fact that we were up against the wall with bringing him back has led us to create a story that, to me, is very interesting and very personal with his character," says executive producer Haden Blackman. "So I'm kind of glad we did it and I have

"Starkiller could bring down Star Destroyers with his mind"

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ It's coming out on PC
- ✓ Dual lightsabers
- ✓ Darker story
- ✓ Improved AI
- ✗ Console emphasis

THE STORY SO FAR... STAR WARS



STAR WARS
Lowly (and whiny)
farmhand ends up
fancying his sister.

1977



**EMPIRE
STRIKES BACK**
Short green Muppet
talks backwards.

1980



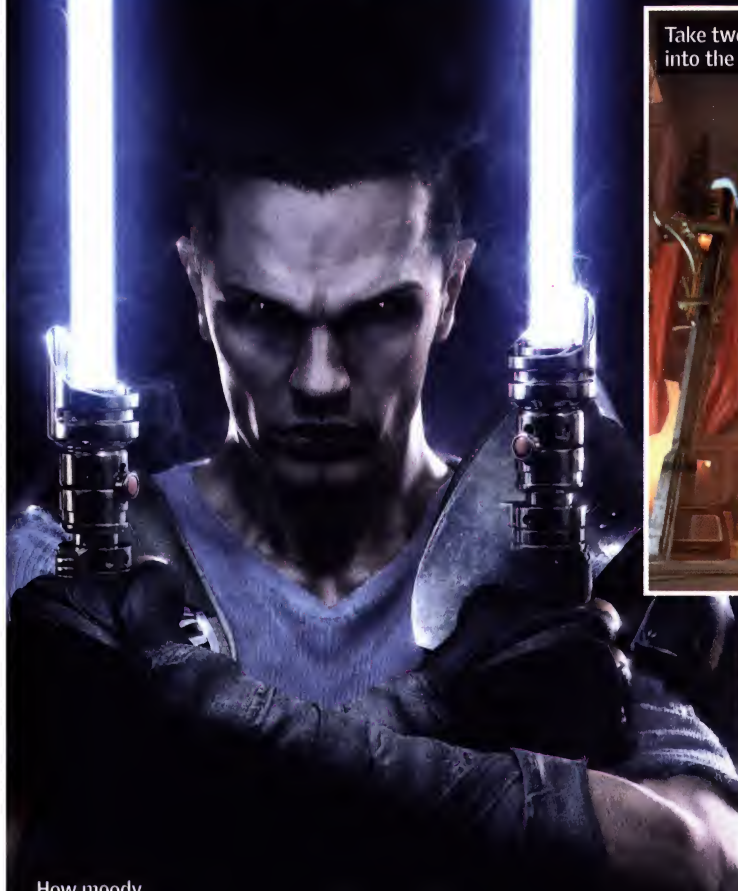
**RETURN OF
THE JEDI**
Gold bikini causes
teenage meltdown.

1983



**THE FORCE
UNLEASHED**
Pre-empt the whole
story in some game.

2008



How moody.

absolutely no regrets about killing Starkiller off in the first game. I'll kill him off in every game..."

Details of the new story are closely guarded, but newcomers to the game will be given a recap. As Blackman says, "The fact that he's tormented by his memories gives you flashes of his relationship with some of the other characters, but the goal was to tell a self-contained story. You can come in without knowing anything about *TFU*, even very little about *Star Wars*, and still have a good experience. Same with the gameplay – we could not rely on your knowledge of *TFU*'s gameplay to get you through *TFU2*, so it still has to be very pick-up-and-play."

As for the specifics of that gameplay, the big news is that you'll be able to wield two lightsabers, which is

twice as good as one. We are also promised that they'll "feel more like lightsabers and less like Nerf bats".

Elsewhere, the original's AI has been improved, and the navigation system redesigned. The number of units has been cut from over 100 vanilla types to between 20 and 25 specialised ones to ensure that each has some tactical relevance. Boss battles will be fewer but longer, and the occasionally flaky Force Grip mode will hopefully be fixed.

We were also given a sneak glimpse of what LucasArts describe as 'run-for-your-life moments,' wherein you frantically leg it towards the camera as mayhem ensues in your wake.

We saw a bit of the first level, set in Kamino – which is, of course, the watery world where the Clone Army

Take two lightsabers
into the battle?



Leg or breast?



for the Galactic Republic was created (thanks Wookieepedia). With an upgraded engine, the trademark lush vistas were in evidence, and the same voice actor was on duty as Starkiller, apparently another reason to bring the character back.

With Starkiller fleeing from Vader and going to Dagobah – the place where Luke Skywalker had his visions about killing himself – there's a strong whiff of *Empire Strikes Back* about *TFU2*, not least because it's the second instalment of a probable trilogy.

This is a comparison Blackman welcomes, admitting, "I really feel like this is our *Empire Strikes Back* in a lot of ways. Thematically it feels a lot like *Empire*. It's darker than *TFU*, Vader's a pivotal figure, and there's some overlap in terms of the places that you go. The ending will make people rethink how *A New Hope* begins."

If nothing else, it'll be an excuse to watch the trilogy again. The proper one of course. **PCZ**

SURE GEORGE Does Uncle George approve?

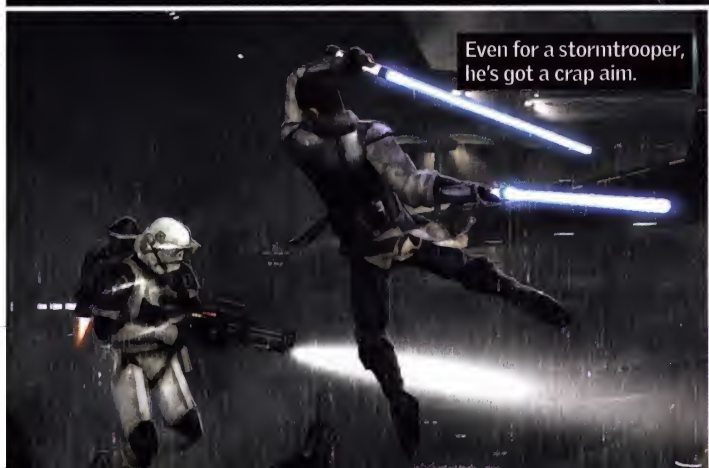
George Lucas is a busy man, what with counting all of his money and deflecting criticism. So does he stick his beak in the games side of things?

"He's definitely aware of everything that we do," says executive producer Haden Blackman. "He was heavily involved with *The Force Unleashed*. I didn't know if he'd go for this idea of over-the-top crazy force powers, the idea of Darth Vader's secret apprentice, and setting the game in that time period between *Episodes III* and *IV*."

"He's of the mind-set, I'm a filmmaker, you are gamemakers. Go make the best game you can." The one thing he says to us all the time is 'Don't let *Star Wars* constrain you from making the best game you can.'"



Even for a stormtrooper,
he's got a crap aim.



He looks evil. Maybe he kidnapped her?

MISSING



PLEASE HELP

ETA
SPRING
2011

COMING AROUND AGAIN...

DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION

He might not have metal arms, but *David Brown* can still type up a storm

DEVELOPER Eidos Montreal PUBLISHER Square Enix WEBSITE deusex.com

IS IT GETTING to the point that "primarily first person" is a highlight of a preview? Not really, but with so many third-person *Unreal Engine* games coming along, it's a shock to see something different.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution isn't being spewed from the Unreal clone factory. You'll be looking through the protagonist's eyes for the vast majority of the game and that allows everyone in PC land to breathe a huge sigh of relief.

Those of a cynical disposition are expecting *Human Revolution* to be another banal remake, from a publisher aiming to cash in on a once-respected name. But they're going to be proven wrong. At least, it seems so, even though 'cover system' describes the game's stealth aspect.

Go into sneaky mode by pressing the cover key and you'll be presented with a

third-person view, but this is so you can see what's round the corner. That's not so bad as it stops the risk of being detected by leaning around corners. The camera also detaches itself from inside your eyeballs when you snap someone's neck or use another kind of fancy killing blow on a nearby enemy.

To get into the position to nail someone in the throat with a sharp

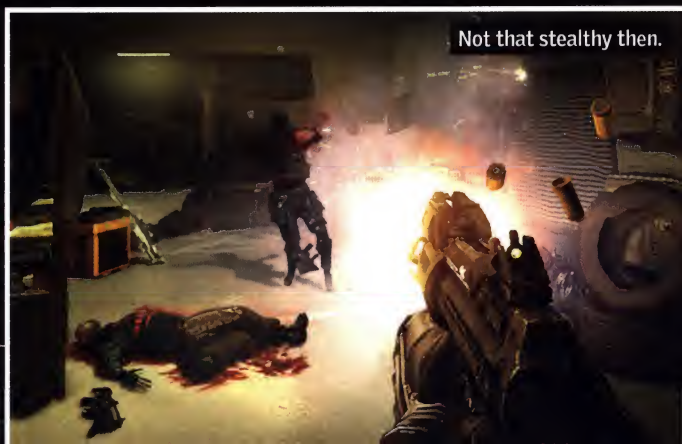
object, you'll have to get close to them and this can only be achieved either by teleportation or stealth. The former doesn't exist in *Deus Ex*, so it'll have to be done the old-fashioned way. Or not, in *Human Revolution's* case, because the system employed in this particular game is all about line of sight. You don't have to worry about the intensity of the shadows you're in, just whether the patrolling guard is looking your way.

Questions about the sharpness of the

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Not a run-and-gun game
- ✓ Interesting augmentations
- ✓ Tudor cyberpunk
- ✓ Primarily first-person
- ✗ Console affectations

Not that stealthy then.



"Those of a cynical disposition are expecting another banal remake..."

THE STORY SO FAR...
SEQUELS THAT WERE BETTER



MAGNUM FORCE
Dirty Harry's second film shows indoor motorbiking is easy.



MAD MAX 2
Notable for featuring Vernon Wells' first movie performance.



THE WRATH OF KHAN
Ricardo Montalban's is still tear inducing.



DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION
Will it be better than the original?

1973

1981

1982

2011



Overkill. They're only a few yards away.



Too much electricity.



Too much gel.

"But they're going to be proved wrong. At least, it seems so..."

eyesight of guards, especially in a world of artificial augmentation, will have to wait, but it'll be refreshing to not gulp when presented with a room that isn't full of conveniently placed dark bits.

PSYCHIC CYBORG

'Stealth' is the watch word for the whole game. Eidos Montreal are on record saying they don't want the game to end up as a run-and-gun shooter. Even with all sorts of biomechanical jiggery pokery going on in your body, you'll still only be able to take a couple of hits before hitting the deck. There may be some kind of ability that allows you to take a great deal of damage, but using it, if it does end up in the game, will cost you a shot of energy.

Ten of the different augmentations are known so far, including enhanced

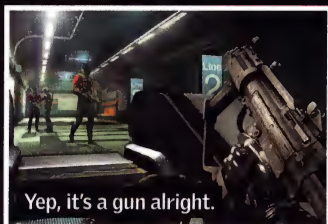
vision, strength, cloak (invisibility), and wrist blades, which allow for some blood-splattering lethal takedowns. These are all fairly standard, but there are some interesting ones.

Mind reading will give you subtle (or perhaps glaringly obvious) clues as to which direction to proceed during conversations, while mind control gives you the chance to go Derren Brown on people's brains, bending them to your will. However, they'll remember you having done this and get unreasonably chippy about it later on.

Each ability costs a shot of energy, which isn't of any real interest until you learn each shot can only be used once per mission, unless you can find somewhere to recharge them.

If you have five shots, you can use five of your abilities while in





Yep, it's a gun alright.



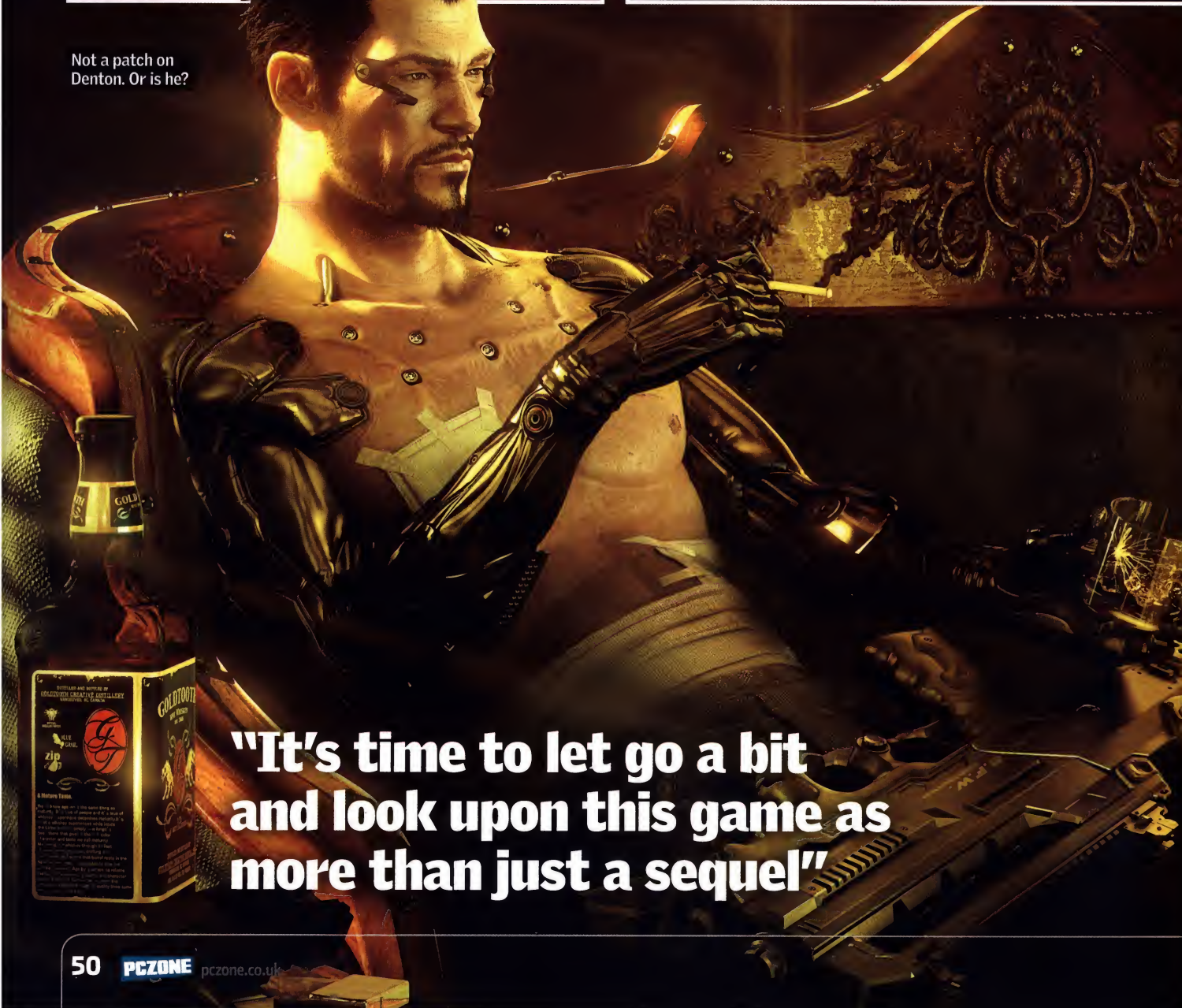
She's wearing a hoodie:
call the *Daily Mail*.



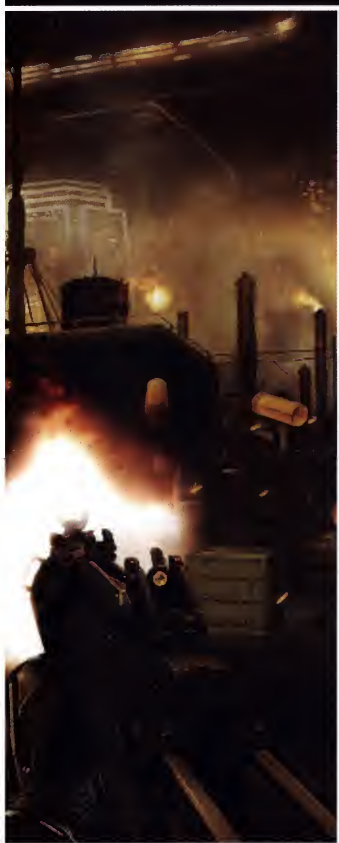
Not a patch on
Denton. Or is he?



The two-tier city is
in the background.



**"It's time to let go a bit
and look upon this game as
more than just a sequel"**



the field. The final slot does recharge, but very slowly. This all means you have to make sure you don't recklessly waste your abilities, or you'll end up having a difficult time.

PEOPLE OF SHANGHAI

Once you've completed your objectives, your energy will be fully recharged and you'll end up in one of *Human Revolution's* hub areas.

One of these will be Shanghai, which now has a city built on top of the old one, leaving the original metropolis in perpetual darkness. This hub is full of people, all of whom can be talked to in more than perfunctory way.

This is difficult to believe, but Eidos Montreal are sticking to their guns on the topic, claiming that minor NPCs' dialogue won't be the monosyllabic repetitive one-liner affairs. Regardless of these incidental conversations though, which will be of the basic couple of choices, different outcomes type, the more fleshed out characters will be different kettle of vocal fish altogether.

According to Eidos Montreal, it takes between six to eight hours to record a fully branched conversation for each character you'll engage in a proper talk with, such are the apparent intricacies of the dialogue paths. People will also go on for much longer than you'll be used to, which could be a superb thing or utterly horrible, depending on the quality of the writing and the voice acting involved. A lot is going to hinge on who you get to play and, more importantly, who plays him.

In a game with a focus on chatting, it's important you don't despise the person doing the said verbalising. There's no JC Denton here, being that he'd be minus two years old at the time *Human Revolution* takes place. No matter how much augmentation someone has, being a mere glint in the bio-milkman's eye isn't going to help in the fight against futuristic global corruption. Instead, you'll be one Adam Jensen, a security guard whose arms have been sundered from his body by some augmented swine. This would be the end of most people's career in international espionage you'd think, but not for Jensen. He's only gone and got himself some big and glossy robotic arms, hasn't he?

At first, Jensen's metal hands will only allow for very basic abilities to be initiated, like strength boosts. As the game progresses, perhaps to simulate the character getting used to his new body parts, more refined tasks can be performed. There are 19 other areas of your previously fleshy body that you can augment if you so choose, but there's no news on how you'll be able to customise your character beyond the cybernetics. A long, dark trench coat is clearly a given, but what else?

If it's anything like the style of the two cross-sections of the society you'll cross paths with, you could end up with a cyberpunk, *Blade Runner*-esque look or a curious Elizabethan-cum-Renaissance style, complete with comedy ruffs that make you like a bird that's swallowed a plate. This latter style is the one that's featured most

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

A look at what could go right or wrong

COVER SYSTEM

PRO: It might not be as bad as you think, with a third-person view when you cling to a wall providing a sensible view of your immediate environs.

CON: Is it actually necessary? We got by without it in the first game, so why do we need it now?

TALKING

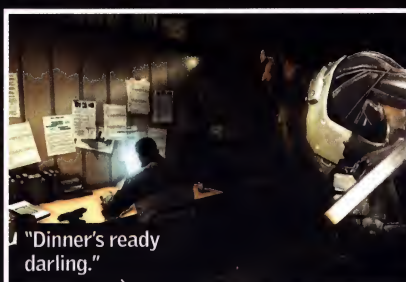
PRO: Adam Jensen's voice is menacing and gravelly, with the multi-stranded conversation system providing plenty of scope for creating a personalised story.

CON: Chat, chat, chat, natter, natter, waffle. If the conversations are as long as it seems, it could send audiences to sleep, especially if the other voice actors turn out to be rubbish.

STEALTH

PRO: A lack of almost nonexistent shadows providing complete cover is a good thing, hopefully allowing for some realistic sneak-'em-up action.

CON: It sounds like action fans might be forced to go down the stealth route, whether they like it or not.



"Dinner's ready darling."

Nobody in their right mind would predict *Human Revolution* as having anything akin to the quality of the original, but maybe it's time to let go a bit and look upon this game as more than just a sequel to a revered game and more and as a title that will be standing on its own merits.

While the spectre of cross-platform production is bound to blight *Human Revolution* in some ways, the signs currently are that such influences will be slight at best, and that a worthwhile *Deus Ex* game might end up on our hard drives after over a decade of patient waiting. **PGZ**

prominently in the imagery that's been made available up until now, and is representative of the way the rich members of *Human Revolution's* communities dress.

However the NPCs are dressed, they all believe in something. There are plenty of factions in the *Human Revolution* universe, some of which are separated by the question of augmentation, either pro- or anti-sticking biomechanics into your body.

One of these is related to a potential reappearance by Tracer Tong, although messages coming out of Eidos Montreal are that nobody from the original games will feature. However, having said that, some of the original voice actors have been hired to reprise certain roles, so it seems the water is rather murky as far as this issue goes.

WORTHY CHILD

Regardless of who does or doesn't make a cameo appearance, as more information leaks out of Canada, the more we can form a more complete picture of what is to be expected from this most important of games. To follow up a legendary title so beloved by so many, and to please them, is impossible, as there's almost nothing they could do to satisfy the fanboys out there.

Too much time has gone by and, just like Valve might find out when *Episode 3* (or *Half-Life 3* even) finally sees the light of day, delays and water under the bridge breed unrealistic expectations.



No wheels = bad.



Your new chopper pilot.

BACK IN BLACK...

CALL OF DUTY: BLACK OPS

Steve Hill embarks on a covert operation to Hammersmith

DEVELOPER Treyarch PUBLISHER Activision [WEBSITE callofduty.com](http://www.callofduty.com)



A nice bit of rappelling.

ZOMBIE NATION

As anyone who completed Treyarch's *Call Of Duty: World At War* will attest, the best thing about the entire game was the unlockable Nazi Zombies level, an extraordinarily tense affair that enthralled even the most small-minded zombie hater. So what are the chances of *Black Ops* featuring Cold War zombies?

Studio head Mark Lamia: "Here's the deal. Although I can't tell you what we're doing, we think zombies are really cool. One of the things I think we love about them the most is that it's community-adopted. It was a fun unlock and obviously we took some creative liberties at the end of *World at War*." No shit – Nazis rising from the dead? And we'll take that as a 'yes', by the way.

TWO DAYS BEFORE I was due to fly to Los Angeles to see this game, a volcano erupted in Iceland, spewing noxious ash clouds into the atmosphere and condemning me to three days sat in my garden instead of on a Santa Monica beach.

Never mind, if the Hill can't go to Treyarch, let Treyarch come to the Hill. Or rather to Simon Le Bon's studio just down the road in west London, where Activision's pre-E3 event is being held. Treyarch are clearly the big swinging dicks of the show, as while everyone dutifully sits through *Spider-Man* and

Transformers, we're really only there about one game, which is shown last and at ear-splitting volume, in case we weren't paying attention.

MIDDLING DOGS

The huge mess at Infinity Ward has irrefutably changed the dynamic of the *Call Of Duty* franchise.

With the senior staff of the *Modern Warfare* developer carefully taking their toys out of their pram to another more welcoming pram, rather than just throwing them out, Treyarch have a chance to establish themselves as the new cock in the roost. To throw in a tenuous football analogy, it's like when Ronaldo left Manchester United and Rooney filled his boots.

Whether Treyarch can do this will be decided in November, but for now they're keen to shed their second-string status, whooping, hollering and high-fiving away despite an Infinity Ward-sized elephant in the room.

"Get some!
Get some!"



The two levels shown, both set in 1968, are those featured previously in *PC ZONE*: WMD is based in snowbound Russia, and Slaughterhouse is set in around the Battle of Hue, part of the Tet Offensive in the Vietnam War.

While *Modern Warfare 2* could be said to be a tad OTT the action on

show in WMD is arguably even more preposterous, not least when you fly to the edge of space and then start moving troops around Russia, before becoming one of them and embarking on a crossbow-based killing spree, with a bit of rappelling thrown in as well for good measure.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Spans the cold war
- ✓ Based on real events
- ✓ Experimental weapons
- ✓ Varied locations
- ✓ Zombie mode inevitable
- ✗ Infinity who?

THE STORY SO FAR... CALL OF DUTY



IN THE BEGINNING
WWII first-person shooter *Call Of Duty* spawns two sequels.

2003



THE MODERN WORLD
Modern Warfare brings COD up to date.

2007



BACK ONCE AGAIN
Treyarch takes things back to WWII with *COD: World At War*.

2008



HOW MODERN?
Modern Warfare 2 does OK. Everyone lives happily ever after.

2009

ETA
**9 NOV
2010**

Ray Mears was moving up in the world.



In Vietnam things are even more ferocious, as you call in helicopter strikes and decimate the local populace with a shotgun using incendiary shells known as Dragon's Breath.

While it's tempting to assume that the developers are making things up as they go along, there appears to be methodical research in Treyarch's madness. As studio head Mark Lamia quips, "I'm pretty sure the CIA and possibly some other governments have

to be monitoring our building. I'm sure we set off just about every red flag."

As is obligatory when developing war games, Treyarch have drafted in the services of a veteran: one Major John Plaster, a former member of the covert special forces unit the game is inspired by – the SOG: Military Assistance Command, Vietnam – Special Operations Group.

The SOG were responsible for some hot wars during the Vietnam and Cold

"There appears to be methodical research in Treyarch's madness"

Wars, carrying out 'unconventional warfare' on a largely no-questions-asked basis. Members could even commandeer a general's jeep if required, as well as having their pick of any available weaponry.

TOP DOGS

"These guys were top-end special forces," says Lamia. "Major Plaster would tell us that they would get their intelligence and be given their mission briefing and then they'd have the ability, with their team, to determine what the tools were to be successful with their mission."

"They'd literally go into armouries and help themselves. They'd modify weaponry, pack their own ammo, and use alternative forms of ammo. Now

that was real life, but as game designers that is awesome for getting creative, being able to come up with what we want to do in gameplay."

So while *Black Ops* is steeped in some kind of reality, Treyarch have given themselves enough leeway to ensure that gameplay is the priority. As Lamia stresses, "It's a really liberating creative experience, but first and foremost we're making an entertainment product, a game."

As for the multiplayer, a four-player co-op mode is confirmed, but Treyarch are currently remaining covert as to the details. All we're told is that it will have an emphasis on 'socialisation, personalisation and customisation.' So does Facebook, but we're not doing two pages on that. **PCZ**

"I'll carve you to bleedin' ribbons!"



UPFRONT **FIRST LOOK**



DIE KATANA!

SHOGUN 2: TOTAL WAR

David Brown loves a bit of seppuku in the morning

DEVELOPER Creative Assembly PUBLISHER SEGA WEBSITE totalwar.com

ETA
SPRING
2011

Our sprites are
all grown up...



World Cup 1564:
Japan vs Korea.



THE BEST THING that's come out about *Shogun 2: Total War* hasn't got anything to do with ninja, koku, daimyo or those sorts of things. It's the boats and the fact they'll be like floating sheds. That might sound like a stupid thing to be excited about, but just think of the possibilities. Two big canoes crash into each other, dozens of samurai spilling onto each deck, hacking each other to bits with their razor-sharp swords. And those are just the smaller ones – there are also castles-on-water, which sound too awesome to be true.

There's more to this sequel to the beloved and now-ancient *Shogun* than floating boxes. The essentials will be pretty much the same – take control of one of eight factions vying for control of the Land of the Rising Sun, build up your armies and economy until none can stand in your way.

In Japan the Emperor holds ultimate power, except he can be easily manipulated by his nominated warlord, the titular Shogun. It's your job to be deemed worthy of that role and to control the Emperor like a puppet, much like the medieval Papacy was the lapdog of any number of medieval European kings.

"It's basically the game we wanted to make right at the beginning," says *Shogun 2*'s lead game designer Kamie Russell. "I think we're just pushing as hard as we possibly can to capture the entire feel and look of feudal Japan, while creating something that's vivid and beautiful. That's reflected all the way through the game, in terms of wood blocks and prints that appear on various screens how the actual way the battlefields themselves work and look, and the campaign map."

Far Eastern art is very different to what we're used to in the West and *Shogun 2* is going to really go to town on representing this exotic feel throughout the game.

"One example would be the passing of the seasons," Russell says, "because we have four seasons in a campaign year. So you actually get the changing environments and the way those environments work."

"We're going very much for the archetype of what people



THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Crazy samurai
- ✓ Unique setting
- ✓ Floating sheds
- ✓ Madcap castles
- ✓ Promise of rock-solid AI
- ✗ Will it appeal to the majority?



"Know the way to Amarillo?"

Shogun 2 will use an updated *Empire* graphics engine.



Duelling with fireside pokers.

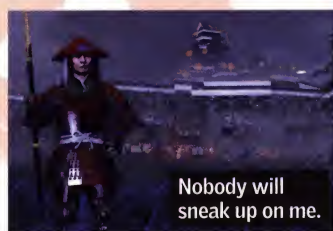
➤ would see if they were in Japan. So, for example, in spring you have the cherry blossoms, and you can see petals blowing away from the trees. In the winter, you obviously have the snow-covered buildings and the entire battlefield is white."

Japan is also different in a more obvious way to what's come before. Since the original *Total War* maps have been getting bigger, culminating in *Empire*'s globe-spanning effort. Japan's geographically small, but that doesn't mean Creative Assembly are thinking that way.

"It's still going to be a game of epic scale," says Kieran Brigden, the company's communications manager.

"The campaign map will still have that epic feel, but what we want to do is try to immerse the player in the mind of a 16th century Japanese feudal lord, who saw Japan as the universe.

"*Empire* obviously had a huge geographic scope that reflected the colonial outreaching of Europe across the globe at the time. That was



Nobody will sneak up on me.

appropriate for the period. For medieval Japan, we'll portray that as an epic environment. We are going to make sure that the player feels that the far reaches of the country are a long way away, they're unknown, and they aren't necessarily familiar with all the kingdoms and fiefs that are out there."

There'll be eight different factions in the main game including the Date, Hojo, Takeda and Uesugi, with a ninth playable in the tutorial. In the original *Shogun*, the factions were all pretty much the same, give or take starting positions and colours. This isn't going to be the case in the new game.

"We have approximately 30 units of different types on the battlefield,"

Russell declares. "There's a wide variety there. If you think about *Empire*, an average faction only had between 12 and 15 units specific to it. What we've tried to do is make each faction different in terms of how they play, and what their strengths and weaknesses are with different units."

"I think what we do want to do is make sure that each faction plays differently, and that's true both on the campaign map and on the battlefield," says Brigden. "We're also wanting to make sure that those factions play differently on the campaign map. You might find that your position gives you specific advantages, specific resources that you hold that others don't. We

WHAT ARE THE ODDS? POTENTIAL TOTAL WARS



ROME 2
Only a matter of time before the scutari-
'em-up gets a sequel.

EVEN5



ELVES & ORCS
Is it a stretch to think
CA will go all-out for
a fantasy RTS?

20/1



SPACE
It could happen: fleets
of spacecraft aiming
to conquer galaxies.

80/1



HOOLOGAN
Take part in skirmishes
like the Battle of
Uxbridge High Street.

1,000,000/1

"The second prong of *Total War's* battle fork are the aforementioned floating sheds – naval combat"

LAYER CAKE CITY

"Japanese siege battles aren't anything like European ones. The way it looks, the way it feels. In terms of gameplay, it's something we're discovering as we're playing with it now, it just feels and plays completely differently.

"The problems that you have to solve and look towards aren't the same. The way that a Japanese castle is built is, basically, they take a mountain with the top chopped off and then build a layer cake on top of that. The result of that is you get a much more staged experience and at the same time you have some very interesting challenges, both as a defender and an attacker.

"Because the castle is built on top of a mountain you have these very sloped areas, you're capable of charging those walls and piling up them quickly, and defending those walls isn't something as simple and easy as it would be in a European context where it's a major barrier to entry.

"What you would do as a 16th century castle designer is create killing fields. That's actually something that you get to see in the battles."

want to make sure that each faction has a specific trait that makes it play differently. Not just on the campaign map, but also on the battlefield."

HERO SAMURAI

One thing that might differentiate each faction even more is the controversial addition of hero characters. Already the forums are questioning this, with conspiracy theories flying saying it means the *Total War* series is heading into the realms of fantasy RTS. Not so, says Russell.

"We're looking at something that's historical," he says. "What we're actually creating is the feeling of the battlefields at the time, where you'd have men who

were famous for a particular style of fighting or just for their bravery, and the effect that has on the troops around them, and the people who were confronting them. They would basically go around with a group of followers and form part of a larger unit. They wouldn't go into battle by themselves, it'd be suicide."

Hero characters in most RTS games tend to be comically oversized one-man armies, which goes against the ethos of the *Total War* series (unless you count *Medieval's* Berserkers who could defeat entire peasant armies on their own).

"We're going for a *Total War* version of what a hero is," reiterates

Russell. "Somebody who's excellent at what they do, often a very formidable fighter, but not superhumans. You can find ways to defeat them. They can't just walk onto the battlefield alone and hold off 2,000 men by themselves. They actually do have to have some backup and support."

The second prong of *Total War's* battle fork are the aforementioned floating sheds – naval combat. Even though Japan was an island nation and was thus heavily reliant on the sea to keep its population alive, ship-to-ship combat was never as important as it was in the West.

While galleons were sailing across the oceans to the New



RITUAL SLAUGHTERSome of the historical battles you might get to see in *Shogun 2***BATTLE OF KAWAGOE**

This fight occurred during the Uesugi's family's attempt to capture Edo Castle from the Hojo clan. In a daring move, the undermanned defenders stormed out of the stronghold at night and massacred the unsuspecting Uesugi force camped outside in a sort of reverse Trojan horse stratagem.

BATTLE OF OKEHAZAMA

This isn't confirmed, but this battle is a famous enough to be included. Imagawa Yoshimoto faced off against Oda Nobunaga, the latter setting up a cunning ambush using dummy troops made of straw and spare helmets. Nobunaga's real troops got behind the enemy and used the cover of a passing storm to launch a surprise attack, lopping off the head of Yoshimoto.

BATTLE OF KAWANAKAJIMA

The fourth conflict between the Uesugi and Takeda clans saw more casualties than any battle in the period. But it's famous for seeing Yamamoto Kansuke, a cripple and a general, charging into firearm-equipped Uesugi samurai and receiving over 80 bullet wounds. That didn't kill him. He did that himself, thinking he'd lost the war.

BATTLE OF SEKIGAHARA

This battle shaped 17th century Japan. It effectively cleared the path to the Shogunate for Tokugawa Ieyasu, whose rise to power formed the basis for the most famous dynasty in Japanese history: the Tokugawa Shogunate. To counter the tremendous tactical advantages of his enemy, Ieyasu used bribery to ensure key enemy commanders hesitated in committing their troops to the battle.



World, the Japanese were floating about in oared vessels, conducting pseudo-land battles in their coastal waters. Because they use of oars, it'll be easier to get a grip on how ships move. They aren't in constant motion, so your ships can be told to go to a position, and they'll row off and sit in one place.

"We want to make naval combat an important part of this project," says Russell. "Japan's an island nation, so the sea is never far away. Naval combat is different in this period. We think we can make the naval battles a lot of fun.

"I think one of the key differences is the European naval battles we did in *Empire* were very much about who has got the biggest ship with the most guns. Whereas we're able to bring it much more into play between different types of ships with different advantages against different kinds of enemies.

"The biggest new addition is that we're putting land into the naval battles, which adds a huge amount of tactical variety, improves the battlefield's look, helps orient the player and makes battles a completely new experience."

SEPARATE WARS

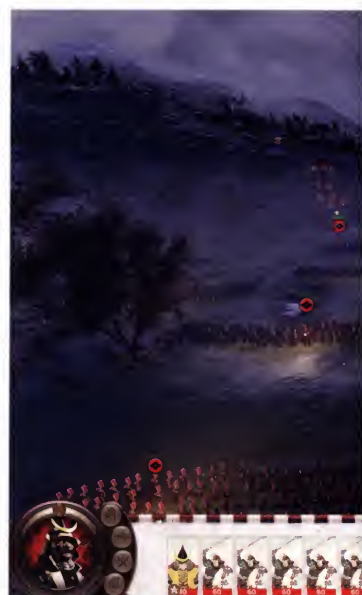
"We're looking into mechanics whereby you can launch assaults from the sea, but those really will be a campaign feature," says Brigden. "In battles you're really fighting on the land, even though the sea may be there in the battlefield. We're going to have land battles and we're going to have naval battles, but they're going to be separate. There may be sea in the land battles and there may be land in the naval battles, but we are strictly separating the concepts."

All these things are well and good, but if the troops don't have the

backbone of solid artificial intelligence behind them, everything's going to fall apart quicker than England during an Ashes test match. AI has been a thorny issue throughout *Total War's* existence, continually rearing its head every time a new iteration has come out. Now Creative Assembly have had enough of the complaining.

"We're putting as much effort as possible into making sure that AI will never be a subject that has to be discussed again," bellows Russell. It's a bold claim, one that, if honesty is the policy to be stuck to, has been uttered before and hasn't always tallied with what's happened in the games. It will definitely, positively, completely be different this time around.

"To give you an idea of what focus that gets on development," Brigden continues, in a less bellowing fashion,



"We have what we call a number of hygiene factors, which are the absolute critical must-get-rights for this game to go out the door, and the AI has been added to that list with an extremely high precedent. So exactly as Jamie said, we won't get to a situation where we are having AI criticised in any capacity, and it is our intention to prove that before release."

NEW BRAINS

If the AI is solid – or solid enough to prevent all but the most obsessive getting irate – Creative Assembly can concentrate on pushing the atmosphere of the game, the feel of being in a distant, foreign land, a place that's so different to what we're used to, it's like a new world.

The graphics engine won't be a vast leap forward from *Empire's*, like the

"AI has been a thorny issue throughout *Total War's* existence"



Naval conflict will be more like land battles.



It's looking very exciting.

move from *Medieval* to *Rome* was, but the battlefields will feel and look far more detailed than in previous games, and because of the lack of familiarity the vast majority will have with medieval Japan, the developers are eager to really go to town on a more vivid, colourful world and are also trying to bring a true feel of what it means to be a daimyo in Sengoku-period Japan.

"One of the things that's very important to this project is that we really want to delve deeply into the feeling of the time," Brigden concurs. "What that means is a real importance for your daimyo, for your family members, and we really want to make character and story a much more significant part of the feel of the game than it has been in the past, and we're doing a number of different things to achieve that.

"On the campaign map we're adding some features that help the player get to grips with understanding the stories that they're creating as they're playing the game, because each *Total War* campaign is really a player writing their own history.

"In terms of the characters, we're wanting to make sure that the players have some real choices in how they develop their abilities. For example the generals, the new agents that we've got, all of those types of characters, we're making sure we're going to give the player the choice to develop them in the way they want to develop them.

"Where in the past it was purely about the trait system which gave these characters their particular skills as a result of certain actions, we are now wanting to make those choices much more explicit. Basically, get the player much more invested in all the characters that they are playing with."

There's one more question that needs asking – why go for *Shogun 2* rather than *Rome 2*, the latter being by far the more obvious choice? It's basically because, as was said earlier, this is the game Creative Assembly have been itching to make for years, to put right what they thought went wrong with the first game, either due to errors, misjudgments or just a plain lack of resources to achieve what they wanted first time out.

"It's something we've always wanted to do. There were loads of things we weren't able to do the first time around and we wanted to bring it to a whole new audience. There are loads of people who never played the



Japanese house boats may contain soldiers.

original game and we wanted to give them something special and spectacular," Russell states.

"I think the period is so evocative, there is so much that just makes it absolutely perfect for a *Total War* game," Brigden concludes. "It's been so long since the original *Shogun* was released, we haven't portrayed the huge battles between samurai armies ever before in a full 3D engine."

This is also a game which promises a mixture of visceral hand-to-hand combat played out in a unique, colourful and exotic world that has never been seen before in this light.

Shogun: Total War was an extremely ambitious project way back in 2000, when Creative Assembly were known for producing poor cricket games. Now they're a big fish and they can choose to do what they want, they have done so. *Shogun 2* is an unexpected choice, but if everything goes to plan, it's going to be an excellent one. **PCZ**



Scary? Not in the slightest.

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ETA
**21 SEP
2010**

That guy is not
under arrest.

TRULY CRIMINAL...

TRUE CRIME

Steve Hill stares numbly at wanton violence

DEVELOPER United Front Games PUBLISHER Activision WEBSITE truecrime.com

DO YOU REMEMBER *True Crime*? Seemingly thrown together in a bid to dupe you into thinking you were buying *GTA*, both games are lost in the annals of half-arsed open-world clones. Not any more. *True Crime* is back, apparently due to popular demand.

In fact the guy presenting the game at a pre-E3 event was so excited that he collapsed and was taken away in an ambulance. The official story was food poisoning, with a hint that he'd fouled himself. A replacement was found, and the crowd was shown one of the most

gratuitously violent demos in recent memory, with even fellow developers flinching, and the phrase 'murder simulator' getting bandied about.

Taken out of context, it's hard to argue, as *True Crime*'s demo consists of a bloke tearing around Hong Kong, beating a roomful of goons senseless with rudimentary martial arts moves before progressing to the pièce de résistance, a meat cleaver, which he happily ploughed into the chest of anyone who stands in his path.

BLOODLUST

There was a hint of subtlety when he appeared to take a hostage for a few seconds, before rethinking and casually shooting him in the back of the knee, to sniggers from the assembled press. And the twist? This guy's a cop, clearly pretty deep undercover. As the trailer says, 'Become one of them...'

The 'them' are the Triads, and the lead character, Wei Shen, apparently has carte blanche to slaughter whoever he wants as violently as he wants, with an array of weaponry comprising of the entire cutlery drawer, including machete, knife and switchblade. There's a lot of hand-to-hand combat, with moves that you can learn in a dojo and subsequently add to your arsenal. The environment can also be used, and we're shown Wei Shen

smacking an enemy into a fridge. The violence is naturally compounded by guns, including those that can be disarmed from enemies and used yourself.

The rebooted *True Crime* bears no relation to the previous titles, which were developed by Luxoflux (who now knock out the *Transformers* games for Activision). Development duties for the all-new *True Crime* have fallen to Vancouver-based outfit United Front Games, a relatively recent start-up comprising veterans from the likes of Rockstar, Radical and Black Box.

Their only output to date has been the well-received *ModNation Racers* on the PlayStation 3, from which the ultra-violent *True Crime* represents a sizeable thematic departure.



That's bloody
difficult.

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ *True Crime* rebooted
- ✓ From a new developer
- ✓ Set in Hong Kong
- ✗ No multiplayer
- ✗ Console oriented

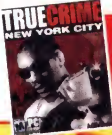


Run for your life.

THE STORY SO FAR...
TRUE CRIME



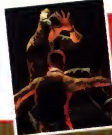
LA BABY
True Crime: Streets Of L.A. was a rosy port of a console game.



ROTTEN APPLE
True Crime: New York City fared little better. The series went quiet.



BLAME CANADA
United Front Games form, destined to reboot *True Crime*.



POO CRIME
Man shifts himself at press event. *True Crime* is back with style.

"FEEL MY HEEL!"

Hoodies never get a break.

"And the twist? This guy's a cop, pretty deep undercover"

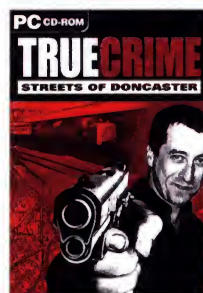
Road rage, Hong Kong style.

TRUE CRIME: DONCASTER

Clean up the streets of Donny...

While the *True Crime* series has thus far been set in globally renowned metropolises, the real issues are often to be found closer to home.

We spoke to Doncaster resident and former *PC ZONE* stalwart Paul 'Mallo' Mallinson about the issues a maverick cop could potentially face in downtown Doncaster: "Chippie fraud, scratch card theft, leaving dog shit unremoved, child abuse, pissing in the swimming baths, slashing seats, stealing someone's pint, never getting a round in, serving Holland's pies instead of Pukka, supporting Leeds United instead of Donny Rovers, car tax fraud, no car insurance etc., crimes against fashion..." Your move, Activision.



"United Front Games are very big fans of Hong Kong action movies," explains production coordinator George Ngo. "Like John Woo, Chow Yun Fat, that kind of gunplay, martial arts, free running – that genre is something they're very passionate about."

HK ACTION

"They wanted to make a game that felt like you were in a Hong Kong action movie: very cinematic, lots of martial arts and acrobatics, as well as the gunplay where you're shooting people behind cover and that sort of stuff."

So is the over-the-top action woven around a complex narrative?

"The story is definitely very serious," claims Ngo. "It's similar to the movie *Infernal Affairs* or *The Departed*. You're the undercover cop who infiltrates the Triads. You report back to your handler who's kind of an asshole who you don't

want to deal with, and as you rise through the ranks you are faced with these moral dilemmas of a good cop doing bad things.

"The Triads are starting to worry that there's a mole in the organisation and they start looking at you, they start asking questions, so there's definitely a very serious tone to the story and there's a lot of depth there as well."

As well as the main story, there'll be side quests and open world stuff such as going on dates, hitting karaoke bars and gambling parlours, and clubbing, providing you have a smart suit or big bribe. And unlike previous *True Crime* titles, the developers aren't slavishly recreating the city it's set in, eschewing GPS realism for a flavour of Hong Kong, having apparently taken tens of thousands of reference photos. Find out whether it was worth it later this year. And try not to shit yourself. **PC7**

Starchy bit of flag
you've got there, mate.

What kind of monster
bombs a church?

ETA
**SPRING
2011**

THE LOWDOWN

- ✓ Story by John Milius
- ✓ Inexperienced characters
- ✓ Setting has huge potential
- ✗ Superpower victim mentality
- ✗ Back story open to ridicule

THE STORY SO FAR...
NORTH KOREA



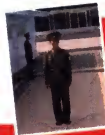
TWO KOREAS
USSR and USA split Korea. North and South claimed Korea is theirs.

1945



WAR!
North and South Korea attack each other, with a little help.

1950



ARMISTICE
The two Koreas agreed to stop fighting, but the war continues.

1953



WAR?
North Korea pull out of the armistice. Kaos find a new bad guy.

2009



PRE-EMPTIVE XENOPHOBIA...

HOMEFRONT

Jon 'Log' Blyth wants to kill some North Koreans

DEVELOPER Kaos Studios PUBLISHER THQ WEBSITE uk.thq.com

UNTIL THIS POINT, *Homefront* has been nothing more than a stylised movie of a time line. We've witnessed, in a boldly animated series of captions, exactly how the land of Big Apple Pies and John Waters will fall to the brutal ideology of North Korea. It starts with real events of 2009, making the whole process feel more reasonable than it is, and ended with an invasion of the USA in 2025. The message is clear: fear Korea.

In making the game believable, Kaos and THQ have dedicated a surprising

majority of their first look presentation to discussing the probability of their fictitious future. Or, to paraphrase former CIA agent Tae Kim, they're taking the events of *Homefront* and explaining how they're going to have happened. It's unsettling – like THQ and Kaos are trying to promote their fiction to prediction – but when you've got talent like John Milius, writer of *Apocalypse Now* and *Red Dawn*, writing your story, it behooves you to take it a little seriously.

So, to borrow Tae Kim's future tense abuse, how will this come about? North

Korea currently has a destitute economy, while famine has claimed the lives of millions. Tae explains that North Korea's poverty can be explained due to the expense of maintaining the world's fourth largest standing army.

YOU NEED TO SOLO

Even while Korean soldiers are standing there, they're dwarfed by the bewildering might of the US, which for decades has taken it upon itself to finger as many oily global pies as possible. Kaos Studios' first commercial release, *Frontlines*, was

primarily a multiplayer FPS. There was a storyline – Russia and China teaming up to attack America – but it was all built around the multiplayer experience. There were some interesting and innovative ideas – not least the drones, the inhuman presence of which lent a tense edge to all modes. But THQ's Danny Bilson admits, lacking a solo game is a crippling.

"You just can't put a game out now and compete if there isn't a strong single-player campaign," he says. So then, what's the story with *Homefront*?



THE POWER SHIFT

A visual guide to the North Korea power see-saw. This is exactly how the Communists will take over the USA

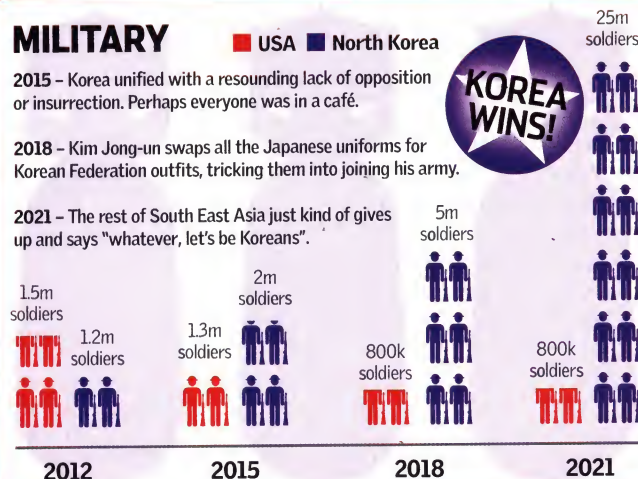
MILITARY

■ USA ■ North Korea

2015 – Korea unified with a resounding lack of opposition or insurrection. Perhaps everyone was in a café.

2018 – Kim Jong-un swaps all the Japanese uniforms for Korean Federation outfits, tricking them into joining his army.

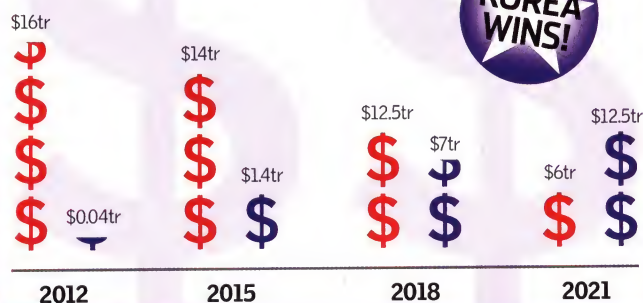
2021 – The rest of South East Asia just kind of gives up and says "whatever, let's be Koreans".



GDP

■ USA ■ North Korea

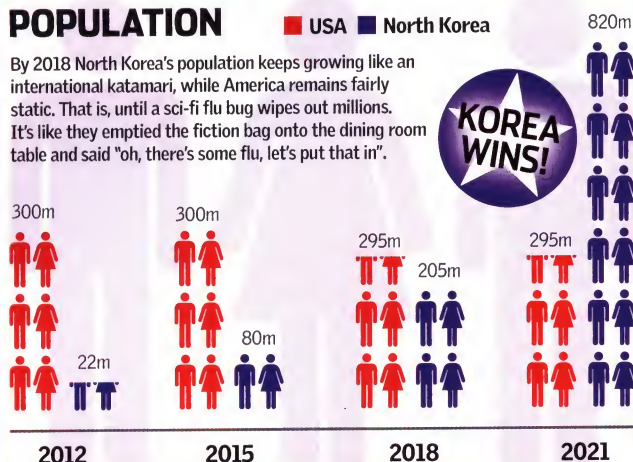
2018 is the point at which Korea could push all its chips into the middle of the table, and America would have to ask Switzerland if it could borrow its watch, because it's got two pairs and it really thinks Korea is bluffing on this one. Look, Switzerland doing that thing with its eyebrows.



POPULATION

■ USA ■ North Korea

By 2018 North Korea's population keeps growing like an international katamari, while America remains fairly static. That is, until a sci-fi flu bug wipes out millions. It's like they emptied the fiction bag onto the dining room table and said "oh, there's some flu, let's put that in".



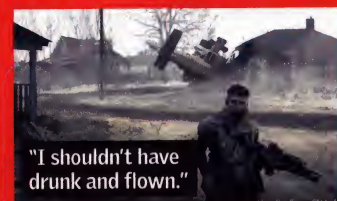
"We hope it's chips, it's chips, but that's unlikely."

After a second round of economic collapse, the USA reluctantly withdraws from its self-appointed role of Governor of the Universe. Its interventionist foreign policies has made enemies, prominent amongst them North Korea. Even today, anti-American propaganda is currently the only information given to North Korea's populace who don't even know that everybody loves Raymond.

RISE OF NK

Tae tells the story of introducing himself to a North Korean national, who was surprised at how human he seemed. As far as the propaganda is concerned, American-Korean 'bastards' are not considered to be the same species as humans, let alone race. Denying your enemy humanity: it's no less monstrous for being a cliché.

So, that time line in brief: in 2012, Kim Jong-Il dies, and is replaced by Kim Jong-un, his youngest son. So far so realistic: Kim Jong-un is tipped to succeed his father, but he's a mysterious figure, with the last official picture released when he was 11. Charismatic and aggressive in 2012, it takes him just three years to unite Korea – and presumably he's efficient at crushing dissent, because we're told of no objections when he stops everyone playing *StarCraft II*.



"I shouldn't have drunk and flown."

Three years later again, in 2018, Kim Jong-un's army absorbs Japan, boosting his army from two to five million. Kim said this would also give him "turnkey access to nuclear weapons". You'd think that the last thing America would do at this stage is have a lethal flu epidemic, but that's exactly what those kooky sods do, just as the remaining South East Asian states join up with North Korea.


"We're not saying Korea conquers all of them," clarifies Tae Kim, in response to a room full of bemused stares. "Just that there was a military exchange."

I'm beginning to feel overwhelmed by the parade of numbers being shot at us (see *The Power Shift*), so I smile in an astounded way to my neighbour. "This is bullshit," he whispers.

SO HERE WE ARE


A invasion of the West Coast in 2025, helped by an orbiting nuclear bomb, leads to Korea setting up a HQ in San Francisco before spreading across America. When the Korean army meets the Mississippi, which bisects America, they don't cross it. Instead, they fill it with nuclear waste, converting it into a huge, radioactive Berlin Wall.

So, what's southern American life like, under the rule of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea? Safe to say, things take a gentle turn for the horrific. North Korea's belief in its own moral infallibility means that its people can be treated with casual monstrosity, so the general public of enemy nations don't stand a chance. In the artwork, Americans dangle from huge water towers, in a showy equivalent of hanging pirates from the docks.



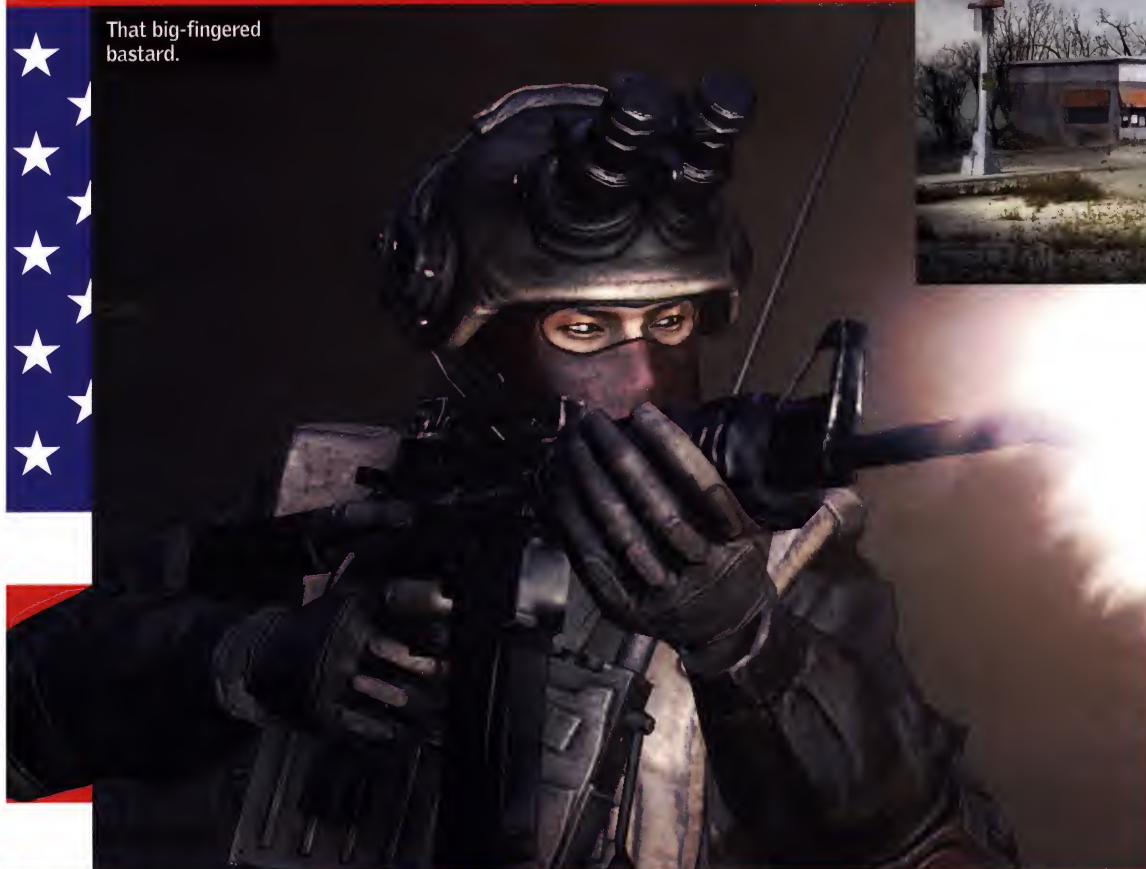
The mankini, the guyliner
and now the manburka.

**"An invasion of the
West Coast leads to
Korea setting up a
HQ in San Francisco"**



That's the US Bungee
Team gone then.

That big-fingered bastard.



Is there a sadder sight on Earth?



Mission two: become attached to everyone and feel safe.



DANNY BILSON
EXEC VP OF THQ CORE GAMES

THE AMERICAN INVASION

Q Did you do any market research before designing *Homefront*?

A "We don't do research any more. I don't care about research. I don't need it. It's all backwards-looking. If you don't know what you like, you shouldn't be in a job like mine. If I have to ask 16 teenagers what they like, to tell me what's good, I can't do this job and I should go home."

How did *Frontlines* prepare you for launching *Homefront*?

"I take one big lesson from *Frontlines*:

don't ship it until it's done. That's a big thing. At Core Games we don't ship until a game is awesome because we can't compete. We're competing with the toughest, best game makers in the world, right? When we have to compete at that level, you can't ship until it's good. So that's the learning from *Frontlines* for me. I think the team would agree. I have tons of learning from *Medal of Honor* because that's where I came from – the old days at EA."

Where did the idea for *Homefront's* setting come from?

"The idea of an occupied America came out of the studio. The flow of the fiction, the characters, the kind of combat, the emphasis on guerrilla warfare, the emphasis on what that's like, all of that's coming from John Milius. He laid out that scenario you saw today with the truck coming in and the firing phosphorous and catching guys on fire and all that, that's John's. The only reason John's not here is because they're saving him for the last few months before launch."

What makes *Homefront* stand out from other military FPS?

"This is not about super-soldiers. This is about human beings defending their families and getting into extraordinary situations. They're not doing this 'Cause we're Rangers' jingoistic, American crap. It's not that at all. That's all great, the other guys do that, fantastic. This is about anybody's home town. There's no nationalism in this game. There's no 'Rally round the flag, boys.' It really isn't. The 'flag' is the flag of freedom, that's all it is, it's the flag of freedom, and it happens to take place in a part of the USA in a future that's an interesting place to turn inside out."

"As this game evolves, as this series evolves, it's not staying in the USA."

Will *Homefront's* story be told from the Korean and American sides?

"You won't play as the Korean guys in the single-player game. An occupying force is bad. It's a really bad thing, and there's no reason to ask the player to think: 'Oh that poor soldier, who is so far away from home.' You have to motivate the player to be able to do the things they have to do. Occupation is a horrible thing, it's a horrible thing for any country in the world, and we're trying to get across that feeling."

Those that have formed pockets of resistance live in camps. This is where our hero, Jacobs, wakes up. We meet Boone, a friendly bearded chap who looks like he's had military experience. Then we meet Conner, a man who would probably have been called a 'jock' in a teen movie. Now, we'll just settle on calling him a prick. Then we meet Rianna, a bandana-wearing lady with some adorable freckles.

The camp is idyllic. Severed from external power sources, it's purely self-sufficient. Butts store the commune's water, greenhouses and vegetable patches are dotted here and there, and a child plays on a swing. Daily life is going

THE JOYS OF FOLEY

Ice and macaroni cheese: what war really sounds like

IN GAME: Pulling bandages from a wound
IN REALITY: Slowly stirring macaroni cheese
 "Pulling bandages off a wound, that was actually in our library. But I knew there would be a scene where someone is sick or hurting, or there's a wound with juices. So I was making macaroni and cheese and when I stirred it slowly I thought 'That sounds like a really gooey bandage.' Despite that, it was delicious."



IN GAME: Helicopter drone
IN REALITY: Matthew with a chainsaw, in the woods, with a Weedwhacker
 "I couldn't get the sound of this old style



of helicopter, this remote control helicopter that I really wanted. So I tried different things in the library and it just didn't come out right. So I hung my mic out of the window and I went way out into the woods and I started up my chainsaw, and mixed that noise in with that of a Weedwhacker."

IN GAME: Land drone
IN REALITY: Matthew's son driving around in an electric toy car

"My son drives a Power Wheels. It's like a small vehicle for kids, electric powered. Like a golf cart. It has two electric motors in it, so I recorded that, and it became the sound of the land drone."

IN GAME: A Goliath Tank crushing bones of an unfortunate soldier

IN REALITY: A mongrel called Wilson chewing some ice

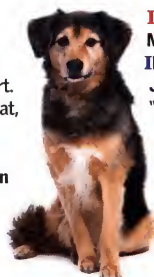
"I was chewing some ice, when I realised that

it sounded like bones shattering in my mouth. I tried recording it, but it didn't sound right. Wilson's more cavernous snout gave the sound just the right quality."



IN GAME: M4 carbine
IN REALITY: Jackhammer

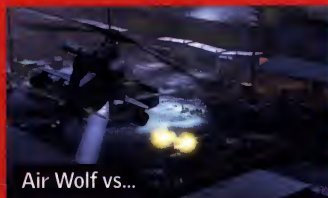
"The jackhammer has that metal piece that clanks really well. They were outside, repairing the sidewalk out front and I went out and recorded them. I didn't expect it to sound so good but the jackhammer really had that metallic, that pneumatic... on the metal it really gave a lot of punch. I separated it out and matched the fire rate of the M4."



on – a man sterilising some jars, a man milking a goat, and a man keeping fit on a battered step machine. It's well-realised, and we walk around, meeting everyone in the camp.

You know you're being lulled into a false sense of security. And although we're not shown what happens to the camp after we descend into the tunnels underneath it, Kaos' artwork tells the story vividly. The swing that the child was playing on has been converted into a torture device that suspends Boone in a star from the chains. A row of bodies has been organised, as though they're being presented to us, and the buildings have been burned.

The second level we're shown is pure action. And for a linear FPS, it has a unexpectedly fresh feel to it. We're constantly on the move, not because someone's shouting in our ear telling us where to go, but because we're propelled on by urgency. When our watchtower wasn't being destroyed by a friendly mortar strike, we were darting along



Air Wolf vs...



Fire Spiders!

corridors of fire with Rianna choking on the chemicals in the searing hot air.

AMATEUR HOUR

Some of this will inevitably be familiar: we have to protect a Goliath tank from the crippling attacks of an EMP rocketeer, but there's still the sense of innovation. One of our weapons tags enemies with a red diamond, telling your Goliath to kill – presuming it's not stunned by an EMP. But the impression that this is a team of people who aren't seasoned professionals is a success.

Any moral decisions on offer here, such as whether to shoot people who are burning to death, don't affect the flow of the game in some artificially branching way – that's for your conscience. If you want to play as a Korean, you'll be restricted to multiplayer mode.

Although nothing's being officially said about this side at this point, it's where Kaos' roots are: they were born out of *Desert Conflict*, their *Battlefield 1942* mod. Judging from the artwork around the building, which shows

symmetrical teams on the USA and North Korean armies, it'll be a system similar to *Frontlines*, with familiar load-outs on the wall: assault rifle, sub-machine gun, light machine gun, and snipers. When more details emerge, we can expect a polished game, hopefully with a couple of surprises.

The effort gone into making North Korea feel like a real threat is still slightly baffling. Tell us a story, we'll believe it. That's what suspension of disbelief is. And even without that, some might say THQ have underestimated the average gamer's capacity to unquestioningly shoot whatever soulless polygons you put in front of them.

Kaos would argue that they're trying to give the polygons souls: and when you're presenting a world where violence and its consequences are displayed, your point will be lost if the world doesn't ring true to the shooters.

So, it's with a new desire to read up on North Korean government and the living conditions of its citizens, that I can report a refreshed interest in *Homefront*. Where *Frontlines* faltered, *Homefront* looks like it might excel: in terms of story, atmosphere and having an engaging single-player campaign. Kaos have only the indifference of the marketplace to overcome. And that, we're guessing, is what the America-being-invaded thing is all about. **PCZ**

"Where *Frontlines* faltered, *Homefront* might excel"

SITHY JEDI...

STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC

"Oh my God... it's full of Jedi," muses *Jon 'Log' Blyth*

DEVELOPER BioWare PUBLISHER BioWare/LucasArts WEBSITE swtor.com




THERE ARE FEW games that have tested the gamer's patience as much as *The Old Republic*. Since 2008's Christmas issue,

we've been fed an excruciating drip-feed of classes, features, and a slowly inflated idea of what the game is going to be. Last year's E3 saw an entire presentation made out of a hands-off demo of one class making a single decision: do you, a Sith Warrior, kill the ship's captain?

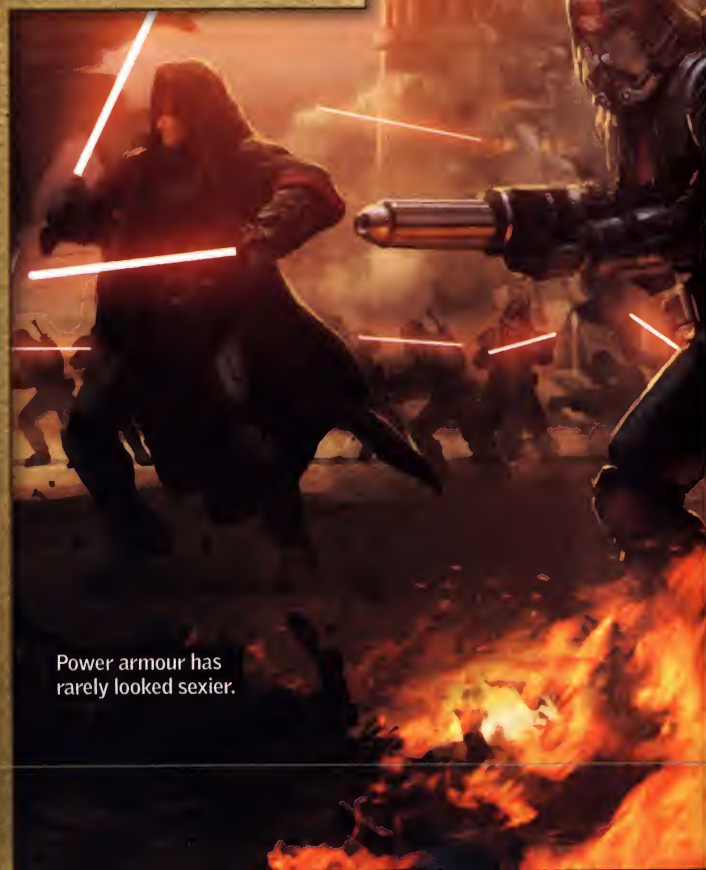
But now, the information snowball is gaining momentum. The way the game will fit together is beginning to shape up, even if we're still a world away from your journey through the universe becoming slightly clear.

However, at every stage, there's always BioWare's reluctance to say anything that's not on the officially known list. And why would they? This is a world of hardcore fans, where even the announcement that people will be able to play a Rattataki bounty hunter is considered hard currency.

BioWare's official line dictates that they don't say anything until it's finalised, because they don't want to disappoint people. The truth is probably closer to the fact that they're controlled by a co-ordinated strategy to keep their game in the news, and fans desperately licking their dry lips.

So, here are the E3 reveals in full and, as a special bonus, everything else! 

"The announcement that people will be able to play a Rattataki is considered hard currency"



Power armour has rarely looked sexier.

STAR WARS

THE
OLD REPUBLIC



E3 2010

What came out in LA



WING COMMANDER

Every player gets to fly through space: just not at the beginning

THE FANS OF *Star Wars* are more demanding than most, and one of the features that always-felt non-negotiable was the inclusion of starships.

Luke's time on the Millennium Falcon, bonding with the new people, using the Force against the training remote, and learning to let Wookiees win at holochess – reproducing this will be essential to a game that asks you to live a life in the *Star Wars* universe. Daniel Erickson, lead writer at BioWare Austin, explains:

"Every player will get their own starship, and there are different starships for all the different types of class. So there's a Trooper ship, a Smuggler ship, and a Jedi and Sith ship." From this description, we can assume that the recently-announced advanced

classes (page 75) won't be receiving unique ships when you pick a path at high levels.

MOVABLE HUBS

"The Jedi ship and the Sith ship evoke the Ebon Hawk from the *Knights of the Old Republic* series, although they are much larger and much more evolved." But what part do they play in the game? Are they simply glorified

mounts? Not at all: "They're your base of operations, where your companions live, that take you from planet to planet. They're everything the fans have been asking for, in terms of the fantasy of owning your own starship." Basically, you can walk around in them.

When I ask whether you'll be able to play holochess, I'm not told no: the rules are out there, and a board has been seen in the artwork so far.

So, do the classes' home worlds serve as tutorial worlds, a starting

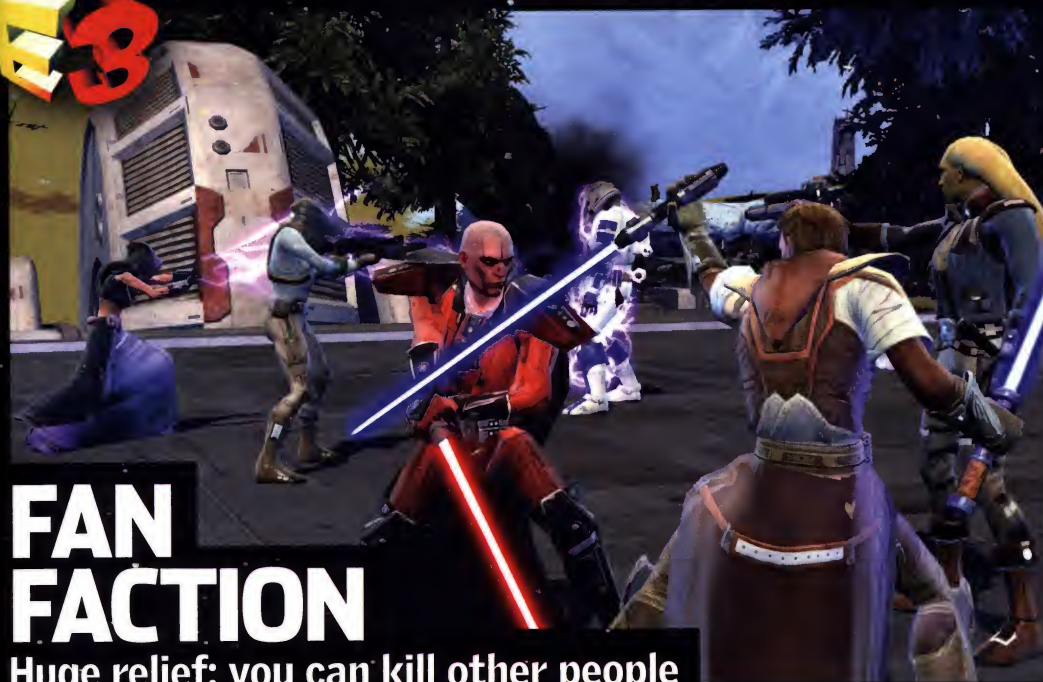
area from which you earn your wings and fly free? "Not exactly. There are other ways to get around, so you won't feel restricted when you start out. We're not talking too much about how these travel systems work, but eventually you get your ship and you can go wherever you like."

The ship grows with you, and more than just your companions can use it – you can invite other players aboard. It certainly sounds interesting, even if we're not certain how it'll work, yet.

WHAT AREN'T THEY TALKING ABOUT...

No-one's talking about where the ships can land and how travelling the universe will work. However, the artwork shows clearly marked docking platforms. Our guess is that you'll land on one of a small number of instanced hubs, and be forced to explore the planets using other, less cool means. We say less cool, but local transit can be by *Return of the Jedi*-style speeder bikes. The only downside being you're not in control of them. So there will be no racing through forests while Ewoks spring traps. A step backwards, if you ask us.





FAN FACTION

Huge relief: you can kill other people

ONE ASPECT OF *The Old Republic* that has been utterly cloaked, has been what PvP will be available to the player who's not happy fighting just the AI.

E3 saw the first hands-off demo of a Warzone: *TOR*'s PvP areas. Alderaan is one of the planets we knew would be featured – it was where the phoney

peace talks staged by the Empire, who used the diversion to sack Coruscant.

As Alderaan is in the middle of a big proxy war where people are fighting for the crown, Republic and Empire players are going to get together there and battle it out. Over to Daniel Erickson, for more: "Alderaan was a Republic world, and in fact the big

trailer we're going to be releasing at E3 is from the battle of Alderaan that takes place back during the war.

"In the trailer we get to see when the Republic push the Empire off of the planet of Alderaan. Unfortunately Alderaan doesn't take the signing of the treaty after the war very well, because they really were ill-used

during it, and they break away from the Republic.

"Shortly after this happens both of the royal family members hoping to get the crown get knocked off, and the crown is up for grabs and a bunch of different people try to grab it at once, and then both the Empire and the Republic come in to support various factions. So it's a big craziness with the noble houses.

"You get into the story side of it when you're playing our giant world with your friends, and you're actually going through learning about what's actually happening historically. Then of course the Warzone is where you go and take place in the battles."

WHAT AREN'T THEY TALKING ABOUT...

Every declaration leads to questions, and questions are what Daniel Erickson is best at not answering. So how does the PvP fit into the game world? We don't know, but we do know it'll be entirely opt-in. And what kind of game modes will be available? Will PvP bring unique and more powerful loot? Will you be able to play PvP in the outside world? They're not saying.

FAN BABY STEPS AND BOSS BATTLES

Opening moments and big scraps

BEFORE E3 THE only hands-on demos had been around the level six to nine mark. No-one had seen the character creation process, or the first missions every class would take. It's also an opportunity for them to show a couple of new playable races to go alongside the humans and Rattataki – you'll also be able to play as a Twi'lek Smuggler, and a Chiss (blue-skinned humanoid) Imperial Agent.

More key to the gameplay was a chance to try out the innovative cover system the Smuggler uses: instead of simply hiding behind things, cover is



activated like an ability, changing your hotbar to a special range of abilities that are only available when you're hiding like a girl.

They also showed a movie of one of the higher-level boss fights at E3.

WHAT AREN'T THEY TALKING ABOUT...

Racial strengths and weaknesses aren't currently being discussed, and nor are the facilities being offered to help people group up, or the mechanics of grouping up when everyone has two companions. Will it get busy? Will real people replace your companions? Only BioWare know.



THE LONG SLOW REVEAL

Using the blessings of hindsight to look once again at the torturous BioWare drip-feed



XMAS 2008 FIRST PEEKS

A PC ZONE exclusive reveals the scope of the game – and the often-repeated statistic that this game contains more dialogue than the rest of BioWare's previous output combined. It'll be fully voice acted, meaning it'll take all of BioWare's skills as MMOs aren't accustomed to compelling storytelling. Companion characters are confirmed, but how they'll work remains a mystery to this day. The only thing for sure? There'll be lightsabers, and a bit of space.

MARCH 2009



BOUNTY HUNTERS

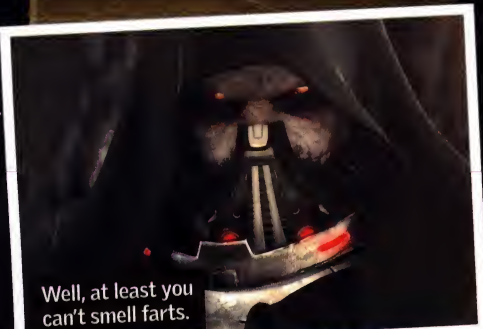
Confirmed early in 2009, Daniel Erickson claimed that each class would contain the choices and scope for development the main character had in any previously released BioWare game. The quote of the moment: "Everyone gets to have its own *Star Wars* trilogy".

However, it wasn't until mid-2010 that we were shown how the class would play. The Bounty Hunter's attacks are limited to a temperature cap. More powerful moves will boost the heat meter, until you can no longer use them. It's easiest to think of it in terms of reverse mana, rather than rage or energy.

The claim has always been that *The Old Republic* will make everyone feel like a hero, through overwhelming a high enough number of mobs before needing to rest, and eliminating the need to sit on a hill eating bread. In the Bounty Hunter's case this is done by the ability to vent heat, which has a short cool down and lets you start afresh – and the ability to heal oneself without ingredients, when out of combat.



Hoodies – the new mark of evil.



Well, at least you can't smell farts.

JUNE 2009

TRAILER: "YOU WERE DECEIVED"

The sacking of Coruscant depicted a key turning point in the battle for the galaxy. In hindsight, it showed us more than we originally thought. The Twi'lek looked like a companion, but we now know that the tube-boned blue dudes will be a playable race. And it's the battle that leads to the new PvP Battlezone, the perpetually contested planet of Alderaan.

E3 2009

KILL OR SAVE THE CAPTAIN?

Last year's E3 brought the open commitment to have every line of dialogue of the game voice acted. It was a vast enough statement to shut everyone up for 30 seconds, before people started asking "Will I get to ride a Taun Taun?"

"We didn't know it then, but the decision to kill or save the captain showed us a hidden mechanic in action: multiplayer conversations. The Sith was teamed with a Bounty Hunter, and each player was individually voting on a response. How does that work, Daniel?"

"When you're in a multiplayer dialogue, you're competing for control. What you'll see is all the players come together, and someone will run up and click on the NPC. Then, the game will create a ring around them, and when all of your party is in that ring, the dialogue starts."

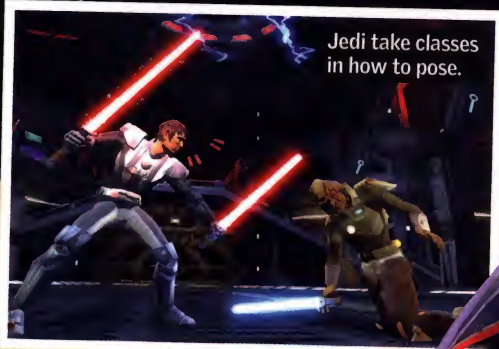
"At that point, because you can see the different perspectives of what's happening, different dialogue options show up. They're not the same for every class, so each person will pick one. What you'll be able to see is that they're rolling for control, somebody will win, and then that person will carry that bit of the conversation."

So, how will the person who gets to speak be chosen? Random? Will there be a rude, shouty stat? "We're not going to talk about how the system works, but you know BioWare loves to let people do things that make them better or worse at conversations. So we're not going into specifics, but you're going in there and having a game of who's going to get to control the conversation at that moment."

LIGHT AND DARK

Every player from every class has the ability to behave in a *Mass Effect* style, towards light and dark. But that doesn't mean you'll be able to fight for the other faction, any more than it meant your average soldier with reservations about his cause will suddenly start fighting for the other team.

What it does mean, however, is that conversation options will always be more sympathetic or ruthless, depending on your taste. But just like *Mass Effect*, it'll always be in character. A Sith being kind will be far more gruff, reluctant and pragmatic than a Jedi, who'll often be nice just for the sake of it.



Jedi take classes in how to pose.

AUGUST 2009

LANGUAGE BARRIER

The commitment to voicing *TOR* suddenly seemed even larger, with French and German versions promised.

SITH SENSE

Two months after E3, we're treated to a replay of the Imperial Captain mission – but with a new class, the Sith Warrior. A melee class – and that means lightsabers – the fact the Warrior takes part in the same mission undermines, a little, BioWare's claim that every class has unique stories. That's being picky, as it'd be ridiculous to discourage classes from playing alongside each other by making the missions exclusive. One promise has been reiterated, however: choosing Empire or Republic will be an entirely different experience.

During this demo, we also get to see the consequences of kindness: the captain helps you avoid a lot of needless work. However, if you fail to pamper his ego, he might withdraw his support once you're gone. What did you expect? He's got a rebellious streak, and you belittled him. These are realistic people, here.

The Sith Warrior is most like *World of Warcraft's* Rogue, with some Force powers adding variety to melee combat. To back up his close-range skills is the Force Leap, which propels him to within striking range of an enemy.

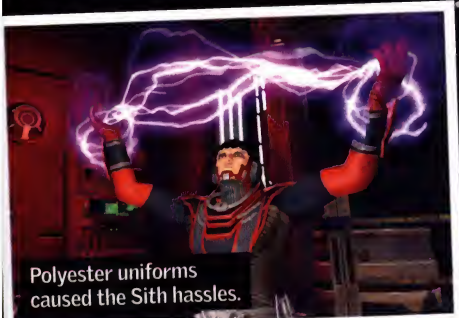
Window cleaners are kept busy there.



NOV 2009

ALDERAAN REVEALED

Princess Leia's future birthplace has now been confirmed to be the location of the first Battlezone, the clues were there in 2009, when the press release informed us that different noble houses were vying for the throne – one supported by the Republic, and one by the Empire.



Polyester uniforms caused the Sith hassles.

Don't laugh at his dress, or it'll mean a Force Choke.

DEC 2009

DOUBLING UP

Anticipating that most players will want to harness the powers of those fizzy midichlorians, two new classes are announced – one Jedi, one Sith. An attempt to split the horde the Sith Inquisitor is a more Force-based class, while the Jedi Consular is a more thoughtful version of the Jedi Knight. In terms of characters from the movies, it's Emperor Palpatine (complete with lightning attack, fans of awesome) and Yoda.

They're both designed to be more mage-like than their lightsaber-dependant counterparts, with stuns and dazes offering decent crowd control, and opening up combat options for team members (some of the Bounty Hunter's skills – and maybe others – require the victim to be stunned).

The Consular will also be a healer. Other classes will have a healing role open to them: specialising a Trooper as a Scoundrel, opens up medical abilities.

The mention of Scoundrel and Gunslinger might, with hindsight, have been a hint at the Advanced Classes that were revealed later.

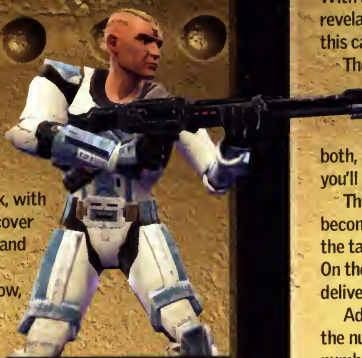


Careful, you'll get a sabre up your jacksie.

MARCH 2010

SUPER TROOPER HANDS-ON

The level nine Trooper was shown, hands-off, a while back, with his use of shields and cover lending an interesting and novel approach to shooting things. But now, he was playable – and balancing led him to feel less invulnerable than they were in previous play tests.



"If I hear one more crack about Abba I'll..."

MAY 2010

ADVANCED CLASSES

With a Bounty Hunter hands-on came the revelation that other races would be playable – in this case, the feline-like Rattataki.

There was also the slightly more impressive announcement, that every class would branch, at an unspecified point, into two.

There'd be one root skill tree common to both, but when you unlock your deeper skill trees you'll be able to choose a more refined role.

The Sith Warrior, for example, can decide to become a damage-absorbing Juggernaut, meaning the tank role won't come into play immediately. On the other hand, he might choose to focus on delivering high damage as a Marauder.

Advanced classes are a smart way of doubling the number of classes without doubling the number of class story lines: "Asking the writers to double their script output just wasn't an option," says Erickson.

WHAT WE WANT TO SEE

The first stage of knowledge is knowing what it is you don't know. If this is true, it means that we're incredibly knowledgeable about *The Old Republic*, because there's a huge amount of stuff we know we have to learn. We're not just talking game mechanics here: we're talking stuff fundamental to BioWare and *Star Wars*. From Wookiees to speeders, here's a bit more about what Erickson and company are refusing to tell us about...

HOLOCHESS

Everyone loves a game within a game, and the circular board of holochess was exciting enough in 1977 to make people consider playing the boring, square version. We asked Erickson whether the player's ships would be equipped with holochess boards, and he coyly refused to confirm it. He did suggest a positive, by saying that "Holochess had been seen in the artwork". That's pretty positive by the standards of the *The Old Republic's* press machine anyway.

RACES

Among the confirmed playable races so far, only the Twi'lek feel particularly close to the original canon. Of course, this is all Extended Universe stuff – it has to be, as *TOR* is far bigger and almost certainly better written than the movies. None of the declared races are among the more casual fan's immediate wish list though, so will BioWare take the populist route and let us play Wookiees? It needn't be imbalancing, if they're restricted to Smuggler class. They're not talking about race bonuses or traits yet (you'll be infuriated, but unsurprised to hear), but it'd be nice to have a Let The Wookiee Win trait, which would allow you to pull a man's arms off after loosing at holochess. That's if holochess is even in the game.

SPEEDERS

Travelling between planets will be in spaceships, and by other undisclosed methods. But forget spaceships for a while. What about speeder bikes? We've seen them in action in the Bounty Hunter's opening location, but they were monorail rides, and not even particularly fast ones. What better way to explore a bit of forest and get to know the wildlife than cruise around on bikes with your mates? You always got the feeling that the cynical bastard Lucas only put speeder bikes in *Return of the Jedi* to make more money out of videogames, so to reduce them to a shuttle service seems rubbish. So, make them steerable and make them faster.

CLASSLESS

With eight classes, each dividing into two advanced classes, at a certain point, the first question is: will you be able to change your mind? (Well the first question is "What are they all?", but BioWare aren't answering that). Can you re-spec, or will you have to replay the first few hours to get to that decision stage again? The answer was a clever distraction: there are story decisions, which the player will be forced to live with. So you can't decapitate a woman's husband, deliver his head to her, then expect her to give you a shop discount.

But there are character development decisions which shouldn't be stifling.

So while you'll definitely be able to re-spec within your advanced class, whether you'll be able to hop your Sith Warrior between tank and melee DPS roles isn't clear.

"You can't decapitate a woman's husband, deliver his head to her, then expect her to give you a shop discount"



ENDGAMES

The only high-level demo so far was a hands-off boss fight, which might as well have been a cut scene or a trailer. They're so tight-lipped about the endgame that we can only make the wildest speculations. Do you get shrunk to the size of a molecule and injected into an Ewok's bloodstream? Will there be spaceship combat? You'll be able to invite your friends on board your ship, but will they be able to man your gun turrets? This is space-sex BioWare we're talking about – when you reach your level cap, will you get to wank a Hutt? Will there be 20-man raids? Excitingly, Erickson hasn't denied any of these suggestions. Although, some of them weren't put to him.



CRAFTING

Erickson's answers have changed over time on the matter of secondary jobs. While he's confirmed that there will be crafting of some kind – and the monsters you kill drop the usual array of randomly generated organic substances, body parts and trinkets – he hasn't mentioned any *Star Wars* equivalent of herb collecting, mining, skinning etc. The closest I've had to a real answer is when he said: "There'll be enough story in the game to keep you going without the need to have to waste time fishing." This sounds promising, but some people like needlessly devoting a week to grinding a minor sub-stat. You're replacing that with rewarding strands of storyline? You monster. **PCZ**



28th ANNUAL
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JOYSTICK
AWARDS**

SHORTLIST OPEN!



LUIS



CHUN-LI



FIGHT!

**GRAND THEFT AUTO IV:
THE BALLAD OF GAY TONY**



STREET FIGHTER IV

Nearly 300,000 votes were cast in the longlist. Now it's time to pick from the cream of the crop.

The fight for gaming glory in the **2010 Golden Joystick Awards** just got serious and only **you** can decide who wins!



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PCZONE

Reviews

Our verdict on the latest PC games

PCZONE swears

- ✓ To only review code signed off by the publishers and the developers.
- ✓ To give you our honest opinion. We're gamers. We love games. And we hate bad ones. Just like you.
- ✓ To tell you if a company refuses to send a game to us before it's on sale. There's always a reason.
- ✓ To hang up on companies who say that 79% isn't a good score. What do they know?
- ✓ To listen to you if you think we've got something wrong. Email us at letters@pczone.co.uk

PCZONE Badges



CLASSIC
(90%+)
Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs. Buy them.



RECOMMENDED
(75-89%)
Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



DUMP
(0-19%)
PCZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty.



ON THE DVD
Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie.



ONLINE ONLY
Don't have an internet connection? Then don't waste your time with this game: it won't work without one.



EXPANSION PACK
See this and you're going to have to get the original game first. We know, but life's not fair.

80 BLUR

aka *Need For Speed: Mario Kart*. Will this collision of worlds come good?



84 ARMA II: OPERATION ARROWHEAD
This standalone expansion adds a new country and gear. But has it stomped on the bugs?

86 PRINCE OF PERSIA: FORGOTTEN SANDS
A cynical movie tie-in that resurrects a bunch of levels cut from the Sands trilogy? Maybe.

88 SAM & MAX: SEASON 3, EPISODE 3
Someone's stolen Max's brain. Go find it.



88 ALIEN BREED: IMPACT
The classic top-down shooter gets a 21st century revamp, much to everyone's joy.

89 JOLLY ROVER
Take a *Monkey Island* episodic game, and then add a bunch of dogs. One for fans of *Muskerhounds*.

89 LEGIO
This take on chess adds some fantasy characters and melee, then forget to tell anyone what the rules are.



90 A FAREWELL TO DRAGONS
A Russian take on Tolkien is turned into a hex-based strategy RPG. Hurrah.

91 DISCIPLES III: RENAISSANCE

92 STATE OF PLAY

94 BUDGET

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The PCZONE Machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable InterPro IPW-Ci7 (pictured right). For more info on InterPro, head down to the internet and type the following into your browser: ipworkstations.com.





BLUR



A suggestive text from Princess Peach shows last night was a blur for Adam Glick

DEVELOPER Bizarre Creations
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE blurgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £35

AT A GLANCE...

Imagine if *Top Gear* and *Mario Kart* had a baby.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 Dual core 3.4GHz CPU, 1GB RAM
 (2GB for Vista/7), 256MB GeForce
 6600GT or Radeon 1600XT or better
 with Shader 3.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

BLUR 90%

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2 90%

SPLIT/SECOND: VELOCITY 79%

YOU'D HAVE BEEN forgiven for assuming, all those years ago when Activision picked up Bizarre Creations, that the developer would just pull a big lever and fart out a racer similar to its famous Xbox series *Project Gotham Racing*. Instead, the team made a decision that caused people to wonder if they'd suffered collective head trauma.

If you don't already know, *Blur* is a collision between stylish *Need For Speed*-esque cars and circuits with the kind of power-ups that Mario packs in his slacks

before a go-kart race. It was a risky tactic, tightrope walking between two stools while piggy-backing a considerable load of expectation, and one that needed an extra six months in the oven before the team were happy with the results.

We reckon they made the right call. *Blur* combines the best of both strains of racer – it's achingly cool and rammed with stylish cars, but also extremely accessible as it's about using tactics from Dick Dastardly's heavily modified Highway Code rather than skills behind the steering wheel.

If you're the sort of person who cackles nefariously as you punt a fellow driver off the circuit in straight-laced racers, *Blur* is your ideal playground. At the very least it'll level the playing field for everyone else.

After the early talk of a social-networking inspired storyline, initially *Blur*'s career mode appears to be a pretty anodyne system, with its list of events and lights that are unlocked depending on your position. As soon as you've gotten comfortable with the basic premise, the game starts slapping

"It's about using tactics from Dick Dastardly's modified Highway Code"





You'll just wreck your tyres young man.

Kwik-Fit's new staff boosted business.



Yeah, it's a car. (What? This isn't *Top Gear* you know.)

challenges on top of the basic requirement to finish third or higher.

For a start, depending on how you perform in the race you'll earn fans, which are gained through stylish driving, successful power-up hits and deftly avoiding attacks from fellow racers.

Unlocking fans gives you a bonus light, if you meet the target for that event, and access to new cars. It's worth noting that because they all have such drastically different, caricatured handling styles, you're likely to find one or two favourites in each class and stick with them. After all, you need to not only be able to chuck the car into a graceful slide around a bend, you also need to be able to loose three of the Bolt projectiles and have every one of them hit an opponent at the same time. OK, you don't have to be able to do that, but it's awfully helpful

when you're attempting to wrestle the lead from a nippy VW Beetle on the final corner.

There are also Fan Runs on every course, which open up a series of slalom-style light gates to pass through. Easy enough when you're out in the lead, but not when you're in the middle of a pack of other cars, all jostling for space. It's also ever so tempting to just ditch the run to pick up a valuable Nitro power up if you're also battling for position. Again, finding the time to complete a Fan Run gains you more fans and a light.

Finally, there are a series of meta-objectives that unlock an one-on-one race each chapter. Beat or destroy the opponent and you'll unlock a mod that can be applied to any of the cars in your garage.

RETURNING

So there's plenty to concentrate on if you want to, but in reality these extra layers are more of a reason to revisit events rather than lofty goals to aim for every time you hit the circuit. The other reason to revisit



Hope he has fully comp.

is the friends system, which allows you to challenge your mates with your best scores, and shows you a leaderboard at the end of each single player event, further adding to the temptation to rub your mates' noses in it when you win or hammer away at their score. It's just a shame the *Steam* version of *Blur* doesn't integrate properly with Steam's Friends list, though even the absence of any external friend list support is better

than the shudder-inducing third alternative, a horrifying unholy pact with *Games For Windows - Live*.

ON THE ROAD

So, structurally the game is well built, but it's when you hit the asphalt that *Blur* really shines. Any doubts about the bizarre mishmash of power-ups and street racing vanish. For a start, this is a game that satisfies all those fantasies of supercar ownership you had when you were 12. Even the earliest cars are extremely nippy and once you scrape the upper end of the performance curve, you'll be barely hanging on as you squeeze the button for a nitro and get exuberantly yanked through the streets.

Clever chaps and chapettes that they are, Bizarre Creations have ensured that the course designs complement the raw pace of the vehicles. While these are street circuits, corners have been smoothed out and the crash barriers are enormously forgiving. What this means is you can concentrate on sizing up your opponent's exhaust pipe

TRAFFIC JAM

Blur boasts a strong single-player mode, but having mastered that there's a selection of multiplayer playlists to be conquered.

Full races against 19 other competitors are possible and they rapidly become utter carnage, often before the first corner. There are added benefits to help you survive the upped challenge though – your car can be upgraded with a selection of mods that will change your car's attributes.

If you have a favourite car that doesn't suit your driving style you can bring it closer to your preferred handling or if you have a car that has certain traits you like, you can emphasise them further.

Plus, if you really don't like the power-ups, there's a playlist of races that remove them entirely, making the game far more like a straight racer.



ANTI-SOCIAL NETWORKING

Make yourself a Billy No-Mates

One of the hangovers from *Blur*'s original social networking theme is that at any point you can spam your friends' Twitter and Facebook feeds with your achievements, replete with the hashtag #blurthegame.

Of course if it's genuinely your intention to have your feats in a videogame appear on the Facebook news feed of the girl you fancied at school, you might as well spice up the stream with some utterly fatuous updates using the same hashtag. Here are some suggestions:

- Unlocked the PennyFarthing in #blurthegame
- Met #blurtheband in #blurthegame
- Beat everyone in the world ever while driving in reverse in #blurthegame
- Just saw Mario in #blurthegame!
- Definitely didn't stay up until 5:13am playing #blurthegame
- Eli Vance dies at the end of #blurthegame
- Completed *Split/Second* #blurthegame



and attempting to post a Shunt projectile up it, rather than concentrating solely on the road. Slam into a wall and more often than not you can ride it out around the bend without worrying too much about the consequences.

captures the spirit of the location. *Blur* encompasses an impressive number of cities around the globe, mixing more traditional street racing venues such as New York, LA and Tokyo with more quirky locations such as Brighton and Hackney in London's East End.

Apparently the circuits are created from a cherry-picked selection of the best corners in the area which are then mashed together to create a satisfying lap. The technique has paid off because there's only one or two weak circuits in a substantial selection, which is masterfully drip fed throughout the career mode.

The entire thing is made all the more sleeky by the way these locations are presented. This may not be the prettiest racer on the PC, but it's a triumph of art direction over polycounts. Every race takes place at some point between dusk and dawn, and the visual style is all neon light-trails and atmospheric twilight.

Blur looks unlike any racer around at the moment and the closest parallel we

WHEELMEN

Of course it wouldn't be a Bizarre Creations game if driving talent wasn't a way to improve your chances. While you can muck along in the early races by clattering around the circuit dodgems-style, if you want to consistently trounce your opponents, you're going to have to master the nuances of the handling. Deft braking into corners can pay dividends when everyone else is smashing around the circuit like clump of fighting cats. In particular, keeping an eye on the road surface is important – getting stuck on dirt in a car that struggles with a loose footing will seriously slow your progress.

The tracks themselves demonstrate Bizarre's keen eye for mixing a flowing race circuit with a scenery that genuinely

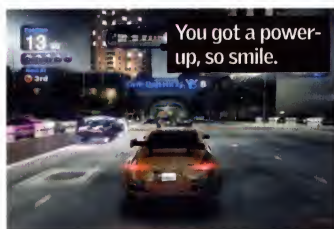




She's straight outta Stepford.



Pink? How manly.



You got a power-up, so smile.



How do you avoid a black hole again?

can draw is with the now-ancient *Midnight Club 2*, though Rockstar's street racer was never this effortlessly stylish.

NIGHT DRIVING

This is the side of cities you see when you stagger bleary eyed out of a club as the sun is rising, revelling in the last few hours of booze-glow before you're pole-axed by the Robert Downey Jr-grade hangover that no doubt awaits you. The same side you see if you're a milkman.

The selection of cars is charmingly out of the ordinary as well. While there's the usual selection of Audis and Beemers, there's also more quirky fare such as the aforementioned battered Beetle, a ropey old Ford pickup truck, and a genuinely hilarious souped-up Transit van.

While we love Ferraris and Porsches, their absence is irrelevant when you can

use a vehicle that boasts a bit more personality and overtaking someone in a vehicle normally used for shifting double glazing will have you hooting like a loon. It's not long before you find a favourite in each class and it's only a shame there aren't more ways to personalise your ride beyond picking the colour for a re-spray.

Blur is an excellent game, not just because there's no game like it, but also because every conceivable element has been designed with surgical precision.

Bizarre have demonstrated they have a knack not just for the serious side of racing, all shiny cars and moodily lit cityscapes, but also for the side that involves firing impossible projectiles at your opponents and launching them into the water at the LA docks.

Every element of *Blur* is singularly excellent, and somehow the game, as a whole, comes together beautifully, in the same way chocolate covered pretzels and Jagerbombs do, but shouldn't. There've been few more enjoyable experiences this year than the vindictive pleasure of smashing your way to the front of the pack in one of *Blur*'s fraught 20-car races. Even if you're generally turned off by the often po-faced racing genre, there's enough outright lunacy in here to make it well worth a punt. **PCZ**

"Somehow the game, as a whole, comes together beautifully"

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Gritty, but stylish
SOUND Thunderous engines and punchy power ups
MULTIPLAYER Brilliant anarchy

- ✓ By Jove, it actually works
- ✓ Brilliant circuits
- ✓ *Mario Kart* for big boys and girls
- ✗ Occasional duff track

90
Serious and ludicrous

The fog of war.
Or, rather, smoke.



ARMA II: OPERATION ARROWHEAD

Lewis Denby should never, ever apply for a helicopter pilot's licence

DEVELOPER Bohemia Interactive
PUBLISHER 505 Games
WEBSITE arma2.com/arrowhead
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99

AT A GLANCE...

Standalone expansion for the extraordinary yet flawed military sim *Arma II*, set three years later in a fictional Asian state.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
Dual core 2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.0 compatibility.

HOW IT STACKS

OPFLASH: DRAGON RISING 90%

ARMA II 70%

ARMA II: OPERATION ARROWHEAD 69%

AS IT'S SET in the fictional country of Takistan, *Operation Arrowhead* features the racial slur "Taki", making this fiction feel too authentic for comfort. This isn't a criticism as for all its problems, *Arma II* delivers a fierce, palpable impression of real warfare. War's uncomfortable. People are going to be racist sometimes.

Still, it's interesting to be on the offending side. We're told that Takistan has an obnoxious foreign policy and is destabilising the surrounding area, but the slurs make you question what you're fighting for in these dusty mountains.

Bohemia's hardened military sims have never shied away from ties to real-

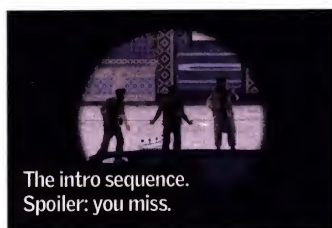
world conflicts. But it's to *Operation Arrowhead*'s credit that the war fought here feels more authentic than ever, with all the cultural tensions that have adorned our TV screens for the past decade being present. Perhaps it was a logical step to create a setting and a vocabulary so similar to the ones we're used to seeing and hearing.

As far as the game itself goes, the switch of location is a welcome one, providing a welcome contrast from the Eastern Europe of *Arma II*. The game looks as pretty as ever, with sepia tones and motion blur creating a tangible atmosphere that rarely lets up.

The change isn't merely cosmetic, however. Takistan is a largely desolate area of the world, its rolling hills dotted with minor settlements and outposts which offer little opportunity to take cover. On foot, this means the tension skyrockets, as you throw yourself to the ground to avoid the top of your skull being whipped off, and then dart like an antelope to the next rocky area in which to disguise yourself.

LACKING LUSTRE

So it's a shame that this new campaign never really hits its stride. Despite being seven chapters long and branching



The intro sequence.
Spoiler: you miss.

Behold: the incredible flying soldier!



HELICOPTER CRASH CHALLENGE

Push your luck with airborne transport



THE GLIDER

Climb as high as the game will allow, turn off the engine, and see how long you can stay floating on the breeze. The record's over three minutes.



LOOP-THE-LOOP

Choppers clearly aren't designed for this, but a loop-the-loop is actually possible if you're at a high enough altitude. Then again, that spoils the fun.



PRETEND YOU'RE A CAR

Fly as close to the road as possible, while following it for as long as you can. Extra marks are gained for travelling along at preposterous speeds.



FLYING SENSIBLY

The biggest challenge of the bunch. This is guaranteed to end in a fit of explosions more quickly than any other course of action listed here.



I really wanted to be able to fly this.



A ghost town in Takistan, yesterday.

impressively on a couple of occasions, it feels like Bohemia struggled to fit everything in. The infantry missions largely take a back seat to several vehicular segments, which, although presented with the most immaculate attention to detail, never get the adrenaline pumping to the same extent.

The story doesn't kick off either. Even by the halfway point, the game still doesn't make you feel invested in its plot. I found myself searching for new and interesting ways to crash helicopters while laughing at the hysterically incongruous music.

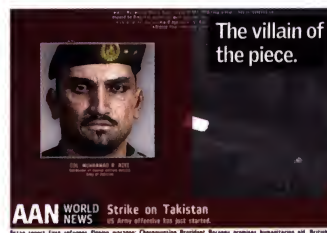
There are plenty of new toys to play with, and it's here that *Operation Arrowhead* impresses the most. Unmanned aircraft now feature, as do a whole host of new units and weapons. *Arrowhead* is a standalone expansion,

but these new features integrate with the original game, meaning new doors are opened in the expansive editing suite, which allows you to craft your own missions in the engine.

FIX IT ALREADY

Of course, one big question remains: Have the bugs, for which Bohemia's work has become infamous, been eradicated? The answer is no.

The engine seems far less prone to stuttering with the graphical options turned up (on a high-end machine at least) minor quirks remain: wildlife twitches and glitches by the side of the road, while NPCs quietly dance on the spot, stuck in an eternal state of perpetually looping animation. If you turn your view around during one the occasional first-person cutscenes, you



The villain of the piece.

AAN WORLD NEWS Strike on Takistan (US Army officials say just started, but some first-person photos suggest otherwise)



Oh, come on! Fix the stupid glitches!

can point the camera inside your own neck. And, upon firing at one enemy soldier with a fairly innocuous weapon, I once managed to catapult him several thousand feet into the stratosphere.

Operation Arrowhead paints what is, possibly, the most chilling picture of the horrors of war than any game has achieved yet. But the atmosphere-breaking glitches and turgid campaign, make it an effort to stay invested with the game.

When the interface remains so grotesquely unintuitive – forcing newcomers to play through hours of bland tutorials to understand even the basics isn't the smartest move – one has to wonder whether Bohemia will ever realise the potential that's so clearly there, and unleash an absolutely remarkable game. **PCZ**

"Arrowhead paints the most chilling picture of the horrors of war than any game has done yet"

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Sepia and motion-blurred

SOUND A mixed bag

MULTIPLAYER Lots of it

- ✓ In-depth tactics
- ✓ Lots of new content
- ✓ Integrates with *Arma II*
- ✗ Underwhelming campaign
- ✗ Needlessly complex menus
- ✗ Still buggy

69
Expands and contracts

Any second now a giant anvil will stop him.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FORGOTTEN SANDS



David Brown travels back when Iran was liked

DEVELOPER Ubisoft
PUBLISHER Ubisoft
WEBSITE prince-of-persia.uk.ubi.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

ONLINE ONLY

AT A GLANCE...

The Prince goes back in time to when skeletons menace a palace and innocents are turned into sand.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2.2GHz processor, 1GB RAM (2GB Vista/7), and a 256MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.0 capability. Due to DRM, an uninterrupted internet connection is required.

HOW IT STACKS

PRINCE OF PERSIA: SANDS OF TIME 84%

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FORGOTTEN SANDS 78%

PRINCE OF PERSIA (2009) 75%

IF YOU WERE to go by the traditional representation of a Middle Eastern prince, our acrobatic hero would have a vast beard, a massive harem of dusky young maidens and the finest jewels, palaces and riches available.

Instead, our favourite Persian (besides Zarathustra) lives an essentially nomadic existence, with only a horse and a sword for company. And just like Jessica Fletcher, wherever he goes, disaster, perturbation and despair are only seconds behind him, usually in the form of some kind of ancient curse.

MR TROUBLE

Our Prince is on his way to visit his elder brother Malik, who he discovers is being besieged in his ludicrously oversized palace city. The battle is going badly and Malik is getting desperate, and seeks the assistance of a mystical armed forced sealed deep in the bowels of his citadel. See if you can guess what happens next.

These events fit in the period between *Sands of Time* and *Warrior Within*, acting as if the last game (*Prince of Persia*, issue 203, 75%) didn't

exist. In practice this means playing *Forgotten Sands* is like playing a slicker *Sands of Time*.

In many ways, this is a great thing. The *Sands* trilogy is fondly remembered, so giving the fans what they want is a sensible thing to do. It's been tried, tested and found to succeed so after the relatively experimental "you can't die" approach of the last *Prince of Persia*, it's good to see a return to classic roots for the series. Time can be rewound and the tension of actually being allowed to fail has returned. Something that was missing from *Prince of Persia*, where your female ally would save you every time you screwed up a jump.

While what worked in 2003 still works now, having no actual

progression, bar the ability to freeze water a bit and a more exciting combat system, isn't really good enough.

Annoyingly, things that did work well in 2009's *Prince of Persia* have been stripped out, like using a companion's attacks to assist you in combat or in making huge jumps, and the hub-based mission structure.

SANDS OF TIME 1.5

The Forgotten Sands still presents you with increasingly big rooms with conveniently placed levers, poles and columns to jump between and, while the action is exceptionally fluid, you'll be intimately familiar with the concept of déjà vu after only a few hours of play. Admittedly, it's inherently difficult to

Turn that frown upside-down.



Now isn't the time to have a nap Prince.



The opening cutscene is fab-oo.

POWERS THAT BE

A veritable disco band of special moves



Earth, wind, fire and, to spoil the reference, ice are the elements you get to control during *Forgotten Sands*. Using a now traditional RPG-lite system, you assign one point per each level gained to your skill trees. Earth gives you a stone skin armour power, while Fire sets the ground you walk on ablaze, damaging enemies that follow behind. Wind gives you an area-of-effect attack that knocks down nearby foes, and, lastly, Ice sends a cold projectile in the direction of your assailants. Each ability uses some of your precious energy slots, which also give you the ability to rewind time, so you'll need to be very careful how you use your special attacks.

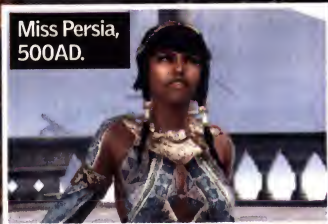


One in the shield for Al-Harold.



Enemies turn to sand when dead.

Miss Persia, 500AD.



change such a successful concept without losing something, but to basically run away screaming from evolution like this is a bad sign for the future. Game development should be about evolution and pushing boundaries, not just about playing it safe and chasing the easy dollar, pound or euro.

Things aren't all the same, though. Combat has been improved since *Sands of Time*, with a *Batman: Arkham Asylum*-style setup where

huge numbers of enemies advance slowly forwards, while you try to chain together a fluid series of attacks, dodges and special moves (see *Powers That Be*). This works well, with huge swarms of skeletons being despatched with swift sword strokes and acrobatics, but it suffers from the same problems that afflicted Rocksteady's release. You still get locked into animations too often, causing you to take unnecessary damage, and sometimes things can degenerate into

farce as you roll around frantically while your health recharges. There are also too many of the boring big brute enemies that rush you with a charge attack, smash their heads against walls, causing them to remain concussed just long enough for you to hack at them from behind a bit. Word to any game developer out there – these are over-used: please stop cramming them into your games.

None of these points stop *Forgotten Sands* being a fine game. It's an unapologetic remake of *Sands of Time*, a back-to-basics action/platform game that will delight any who play it. It's just not original and after seven years, more has to be expected than what *Forgotten Sands* provides.

Perhaps the most interesting thing to arise from this game is the question of where the series goes from here, if Ubisoft are so scared of change.

Don't forget that *Forgotten Sands* is carrying Ubisoft's much-maligned DRM system, where your PC has to be online

at all times in order to play the game. Your saved games are also stored online by default. However, this can be changed if you want. **PEZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Functional.

Great intro

SOUND Prince is less annoying

MULTIPLAYER No

✓ Fluid action

✓ Decent combat

✓ Back to basics

✗ No evolution

✗ Where next?

✗ Dull charging enemies

78

Time for change

"Playing *Forgotten Sands* is like playing a slicker *Sands of Time*"



ALIEN BREED: IMPACT

Slipping a length up a xenomorph

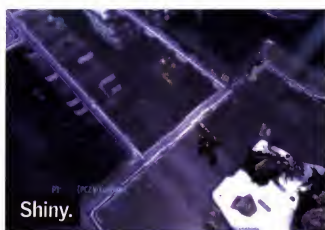
DEVELOPER Team 17
PUBLISHER Team 17
WEBSITE bit.ly/alienbreedimpact
ETA Out now
PRICE £12.99 (Steam only)

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a NVIDIA 6800+ or ATI Radeon X700+.

JUDGING BY THEIR website, *Alien Breed* developers Team 17 haven't revamped things since the original game came out in 1991. Visually aside, this re-imagined version of their classic semi-top-down xenoblaster also leans heavily on the retro side of things: it's simple, fun and has a co-op mode to plough through with a buddy.

The game sees you as a gruff space engineer, one Theodore J Conrad, who has to fight his way through wave after wave of alien monsters in order to reach the source of the infestation. The story is told in *Max Payne*-style graphic novel vignettes, but you'll never care about it. Go there, shoot aliens, interact a bit, shoot more aliens – that's all the game is and that's all it really needs to be.

Occasionally you'll find the obligatory weapons and upgrades shop – each terminal of which seems to be mysteriously intact, despite everything else being in ruins. If only Conrad's employer had made their spaceships out of that same material, they'd never have a problem with infestations.



Impact's single-player game is a solid, unspectacular blast-a-thon. The co-op side is the same thing, just harder, but there's just not enough in this mode to hold your attention for very long. Three relatively large levels provides a few hours of entertainment, but there should've been more. Also, the design screams out tile-based, so why isn't there a level editor, or anything along those lines, included with the game?

At its best, *Impact* is an exhilarating, old school blaster that's very easy to dip in and out of. But at its worst, it's simplistic, repetitive fare with not enough to it.

David Brown



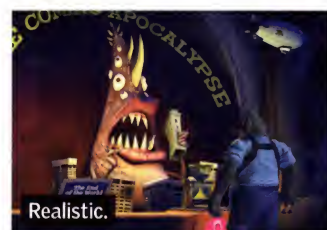
SAM & MAX:

SEASON 3, EPISODE 3: THEY STOLE MAX'S BRAIN!

Things start getting serious...

DEVELOPER Telltale Games
PUBLISHER Telltale Games
WEBSITE telltalegames.com/samandmax
ETA Out now
PRICE £24.99 (five-episode season)

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.



WE'RE THROUGH THE looking-glass here, people," Milhouse once said, and if he'd been talking about this current series of *Sam & Max* adventures instead of reverse vampires, saucer people and the Rand Corporation, he'd have been correct. This is where everything starts getting serious, with events having unravelled since the time-travelling, film-watching shenanigans of the previous episode.

The end of that particular sojourn into the increasingly bizarre world of the freelance police leaves Sam on the edge of sanity and on the lookout for information. In a bold departure from the norm, the first section of this episode sees our canine hero adopting the persona of a grizzled gumshoe, interrogating suspects such as a simian pet shop advocate and a pan-European walking bag of stereotypes. It's very well done, too.

After this, things settle down into traditional adventure fare, with two foes returning to plague Sam's attempts to rescue his buddy. Max's psychic powers continue to be explored, with the reintroduction of the rhinoplasty shape-changing ability, telephone teleporter and the Future Vision goggles.

Episode 1, The Penal Zone, suffered from being too easy because the goggles revealed too much of what was meant to happen, making solving puzzles a doddle. This time they provide guidance rather than walkthroughs. Some might still moan, but they just about hit the right level of assistance.

Everything else about the game is superb – it has an amusing script, good puzzles and wonderful voice-acting – making this Telltale's first product that's worthy of a classic award. Brilliant stuff.

David Brown





JOLLY ROVER

A bit o' dejarr vu m'hearties

DEVELOPER Brawsome
PUBLISHER Brawsome
WEBSITE brawsome.com.au
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
1.2GHz Pentium 4, 512MB RAM, and
a 64MB graphics card

THE BEST WAY to sum up *Jolly Rover* is to say it's *Monkey Island* starring dogs. You can call me a lazy reviewer if you like, but it's a 2D point-and-click adventure game, revolving around pirates, laced with dry humour, self-referential jokes and eccentric puzzles that tickle your grey matter. It even features a monkey in the game. As I said, *Monkey Island* starring dogs.

This comparison is by no means derogatory. Many adventure games might seem a poor man's *Monkey Island*, but *Jolly Rover* is curiously a better game because of its balls-out copycatting rather than in spite of it.

The story is centred on cocksure, dryly witty privateer Gaius James Rover, who through misadventures involving a voodoo recipe book, a riddle-spouting parrot, and a corrupt island governor, ends up joining a crew of canine pirates. The characters are all colourful and the dialogue is fully voiced and well acted, although James comes across as more irritating than Guybrush ever did.



Despite this, the humour is much more hit than miss. The first puzzle sees you attempting to escape from the pirate ship's brig, which contains a crate of skeleton keys, an escape kit with half the label missing and another crate full of crowbars, but no crowbar to open the crate. The puzzles themselves are well-balanced difficulty wise, but this is spoiled by your parrot giving you highly unsubtle hints when you feed him crackers, which are in abundance.

Jolly Rover proudly stands on the shoulders of a giant, and unlike other adventure games that imitate LucasArts' greats, it keeps its balance.

Rick Lane



LEGIO

Chess, version 2.0

DEVELOPER Ice Game Studios
PUBLISHER Paradox Interactive
WEBSITE legiogame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £7.95

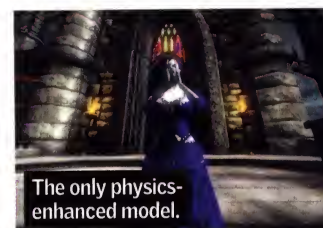
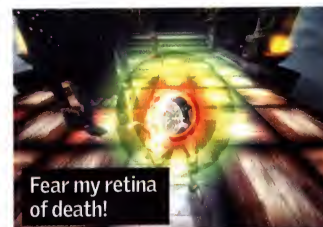
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
2.4GHz Pentium 4, 512MB RAM, and
a GeForce FX 5700.

ICEPICKS, CRAMPONS AND a very long rope: that's what you'll need to climb *Legio's* learning curve.

Oddly this isn't because the game is hard to get to grips with. The problem is it doesn't give you any information on what the rules are. It's a good thing Ice Game Studios don't do bomb disposal because they clearly believe in learning through experience.

Two teams of tongue-in-cheek fantasy characters are pitted against each other in this darkly humorous twist on chess. Units are split into ranged and melee groups, though each unit varies in movement speed and damage dealt. The Giant, for example, is slow and has a high hit point count and a large area attack, whereas the War Rabbit is quick and nimble, but weak.

Legio's most intriguing aspect is that attacks are manually controlled. When you attack an opponent, the camera switches to a first-person view. A large circle appears with a crosshair shifting erratically through it. To deal the most damage you must get the crosshair as



close to the centre of the circle as possible by timing your mouse click.

The gameplay is simple enough that the basics can be understood after a couple of matches, but the lack of clarity regarding the rules makes it difficult to comprehend why certain things occur. Teams occasionally take several turns in a row or one team may do substantially more damage than the other for no apparent reason.

There's fun to be had with *Legio*, especially if you play with a friend in the two-player, one-keyboard mode, but it's like trying to climb the north face of the Eiger while tied in a sack.

Rick Lane





www.oxm.co.uk

XBOX 360

THE OFFICIAL XBOX MAGAZINE



ARE YOU AN ORB ADDICT?

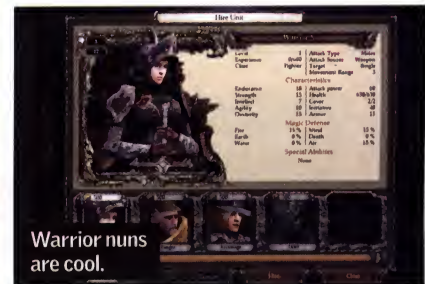


Give in to the temptation. Listen for the sound.
Find all the Orbs hidden in the new issue of Xbox 360: The Official Xbox
Magazine and you could win exclusive Crackdown 2 prizes.

Find out more at www.oxm.co.uk/crackdown2

PLUS Halo: Reach • Hands-on with Gears of War 3
Portal 2 • Project Natal's launch games revealed

ISSUE 62 ON SALE 8 JULY



DISCIPLES III: RENAISSANCE

David Brown has always had a good hex life

DEVELOPER Akella
PUBLISHER Kalypso Media
WEBSITE disciples3.ru
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

AT A GLANCE...

Delve into a fantasy world where humans battle elves and demons in a hex-based strategy fashion with RPG bits.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:
 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

KING'S BOUNTY: THE LEGEND 78%

DISCIPLES III: RENAISSANCE 71%

ELVEN LEGACY 67%

IF YOU'RE THE sort of person who likes to put things in boxes, you can have this one for free – *Disciples III: Renaissance* is *King's Bounty: The Legend* with better visuals. You control hero characters who travel around on a large world map as oversized pieces, amassing armies, collecting items, quests and gold, before fighting hostile forces in a hex-based strategic view. It's a formula that works perfectly well.

Developers Akella (well, an internal development house within the bowels of the larger Akella company) have served a bountiful platter for RPG/strategy fans to sink their fangs into.

The core of the game revolves around three campaigns, where you can choose from controlling the Empire, the Legion of the Damned or the Elven Alliance, each with their own visual style and storyline to follow. There's also a decent tutorial mini-campaign to ease you into things. One thing that's done well is how the usually complex and arcane machinations of this sort of game have been condensed into easy-to-follow video examples.

Combat itself works adequately and there's plenty of strategic options to play with.

One major problem that'll turn off those with only a slight curiosity is the leaden pace of the action, with very little excitement beyond the giddy thrill of turn-based strategy. It's not impossible to imbue this sort of game with visual treats, and while there are some neat little sparkly visual effects when spellcasters lob a fireball, or when a big Titan unit clobbers a goblin with a tree, it's all delivered so slowly, there's little to no emotional reaction.

PLODDING

If you can overlook the tedious combat, and have a couple of friends who like the game, you might get something from the three-player mode. Here each player has to take their turns on the same PC, as *Disciples III*, unforgivably, can't be played online or even over a LAN.

Disciples III is maddening, because it could easily have forged a trail past its competitors, but the combat really lets it down. This isn't because it's bad at all – it works easily as well as *King's*

Bounty in terms of the fundamentals – but it's tedious to sit through due to the lack of pace and panache.

Essentially things fail to get moving in *Disciples III*, although there's a lot to love here, if you can stay awake as your knight chips away at a goblin in a generic wooded glade. **PCZ**

PCZONE

GRAPHICS Surprisingly hexy
SOUND Generic fantasy warbles
MULTIPLAYER Hot seat mode

- ✓ Loads of depth
- ✓ Strong RPG element
- ✓ Strategic combat
- ✗ Can be awfully dull
- ✗ Generic setting
- ✗ Lackluster combat

71
 Needs more flair

State of Play

Increasingly developers tinker with their creations long after their release. With this in mind, every month we cast fresh eyes on the changes seen in long-running games...



Pure space porn.

THIS MONTH...

SHATTERED HORIZON

PUBLISHER Futuremark DEVELOPER Futuremark WEBSITE shatteredhorizon.com
PRICE £14.99 (£44.99 for four-game 'Clan Pack')

IN SPACE YOU HEAR a lot of screams. But they're really samples inserted by a simulated audio environment. This was one of *Shattered Horizon's* more ingenious ideas. Essentially, space is a quiet place, so if you set an FPS there you're going to need sounds, otherwise people will feel as though you've amputated part of them. So Futuremark simulated them. Along with thrusters, conserved momentum, and a liberal definition of 'up' and 'down', *Shattered Horizon* had the makings of a novel shooter.

The only problem was all these little things that made the game so brilliant to play were completely outweighed by its lack of content and a somewhat narrow vision when it came to how much

people would be willing to pay for such a niche game. That it was DirectX 10-only couldn't have helped.

Coming from a company that made its name off benchmarking software, it's understandable that *Shattered Horizon* was technically demanding, but it proved that if there's an audience for zero-G shooters, it isn't formed by those who buy, what were then, the latest in graphics cards.

SYNERGY

So instead of giving up their game as a failed experiment, Futuremark worked on it. They addressed the main problems people had with the game, namely a lack of maps, and the lack of variety in them, and the limits of the game's single gun.

Sun-staring makes you blind. Also: Crazy.



Three months after release, they presented players with the free update – *Moonrise* – that addressed the first of these issues.

Coming with four startlingly unique maps, *Moonrise* doubled the content present at launch, and more importantly presented players with environments that were truly recognisable, rather than dull asteroids and mining facilities. Now there was a giant mass accelerator, aptly

No zippers mean you have to hold it.



Corpses spin out into the void.

"As it stands, *Shattered Horizon* the definition of 'solid, but unspectacular'"

66% – Adam Glick, PC ZONE #213

named Slingshot, playing the role of the galaxy's largest male compensator: a huge, long tube of absurd technology used to fire objects into space. The Ten Stars Hotel, iconic if only because the whole thing is covered in radiation shields to keep its visitors in the utmost of comfort. Of course, now it's run down and has become another half-destroyed battleground. But it's pretty, and more importantly, interesting.

Then there was Flipside, what would seem to be a giant radar dish shattered by some devastating impact, each piece of detritus floating in mid-air only a few dozen feet from the impact zone. It's a frozen explosion. They're not all aces, with Searchlight being the slightly more subtle mining monolith/asteroid field of the original maps. But even this one had a great environment for combat, with enough open spaces and cover to make each encounter memorable. And that was the first of the major complaints

dealt with. Wasting no time, Futuremark headed towards the second: the game's single gun.

Barely three months after *Moonrise*, they released *Firepower*, an update that not only replaced the characters' one gun with five, but doubled the number of grenade types, and added sidearms.

Suddenly, you were able to apply a little personality into how you play, picking a shotgun if you want to invade your opponent's personal space, or taking the hefty railgun if you've got a penchant for planting yourself on the edge of a map, perhaps on a small asteroid, and picking off your enemies from afar.

NEW GUNS

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the *Firepower* update was to do with the changes it made under the hood.

Gone was the hit scan-based system that the previous gun had relied on, and in was the far more weighty projectile-



Death by space cloud.

based system, requiring you to lead targets before squeezing off shots, and making distance a real factor. Close-range weapons require you to be really close to be any good. But by the same token you can snipe someone with a shotgun. It just might take a while for the slug to reach its target.

What all this has resulted in is a game that's truly come to deserve its price tag while making sure not to split its community with extra fees. If the past six months is an indicator, *Shattered Horizon* has a bright future. **PCZ**

VERDICT

Following in Valve's shoes, Futuremark have turned a slightly disappointing release into a full, expansive multiplayer game, all at no cost to their play base.

Phil Cameron

THE STORY SO FAR... ALIGNING PLANETARY BODIES



4 NOV 2009

Shattered Horizon is released, to middling reviews and uninspiringly low sales.



16 FEB 2010

The *Moonrise* expansion delivers with four new maps, doubling the game's existing play areas.



16 FEB 2010

The *Slingshot* map adds some new environments to the game. Including a giant space gun!



5 MAY 2010

Firepower arrives to add much-needed diversity to the combat with new weapons, making things less predictable.



5 MAY 2010

It also adds new grenade types, including flares, radar pulses and decoys, help to create a much more tactical environment with.

Budget

David Brown finds only pennies where there were pounds before

PRINCE OF PERSIA

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE focusmm.co.uk PRICE £9.99

FOREVER MORE TO be known as *POP*, the sore thumb of the venerable series has been harshly treated in the recent days with *Forgotten Sands* (page 86) yelling taunts of "You no longer matter" and "Interquel this!"

While the relaunched *Prince of Persia* might have had some flaws, and its Prince's voice is grating to the nerve endings, there were some great ideas contained in it. Strangely, because this *Prince of Persia* bears so little resemblance to *Forgotten Sands* it doesn't suffer from the problems most budget games do: a later version making it obsolete.

This is a strand of the *Prince of Persia* saga that might never be revisited, and for that reason it's as good now as it was two years or so ago.

The cel-shaded art style is still wonderful and, while it's still farcically easy because of the no death system, which makes boss battles an chore, it's still a decent laugh to play.

This *Prince of Persia* is as enjoyable now as it was in issue 203.



Rawr!



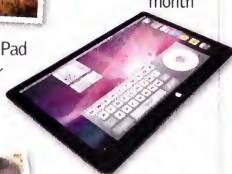
Grind the bugger down.

Cool look, annoying voice.



Steve found a new job which means he never has to leave his flat.
SAVING £116/month

Log bought an iPad in the US rather than the UK.
SAVING £63



David watched the World Cup in his pants, not the pub.
SAVING £345 in beer money

KING'S BOUNTY: THE LEGEND

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE focusmm.co.uk PRICE £9.99

WHILE IT TOOK nearly 20 years for a sequel to *King's Bounty* to emerge, it only took a tenth of that time for it to appear in budget shelves.

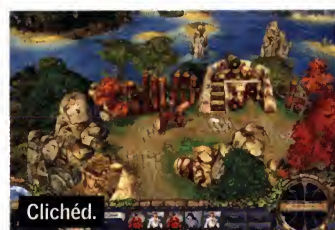
A fantasy strategy-cum-RPG title, *King's Bounty: The Legend* is a good

game, even if its quality is hidden by the use of quaint Tolkien tropes and the dreaded hexes.

Split between a *Diablo*-style RPG and the aforementioned hex-based strategic combat, your hero rides about

the land of Endoria serving his kind, making a name for himself and recruiting soldiers and units for his personal army. Quests can be collected from handily placed NPCs, which grant XP and prizes – you know the drill.

The mechanics have all been fine-tuned and honed to perfection, and there's an expansion (*Armored Princess*) for those who can get to grips with the hexes. You should, as it'd be a shame to miss out on this for a second time.



Clichéd.



The joy of hex.



TWO WORLDS

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE focusmm.co.uk PRICE £999

THE ONLY THING that was known for certain about *Two Worlds* before compiling this section was that the voice acting was really, really bad.

What can be learned from a glance at the review in issue 186 is that it was buggy, death didn't matter, the main plot was rubbish, and the horses "handled like a sack of warm shit".

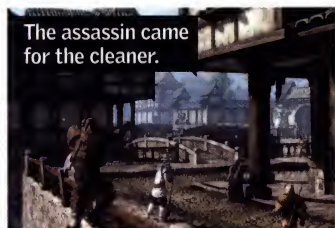
After actually delving into *Two Worlds* for the first time, it's possible to confirm all these things being true. It's not as buggy as it used to be, but it doesn't hold the promise of coming good, because it never did.

Also with the sequel coming out relatively soon, the original begins to look as pointless as a Five documentary

about a boy with an arse for a face, who's struggling to find a girlfriend who likes rimming, so he can experience his first French kiss.

Mind you, watching that show maybe preferable to playing *Two Worlds*. It's a tricky one that.

PCZONE
53



4X4 HUMMER

PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia WEBSITE focusmm.co.uk PRICE £999

OBSCURE RUSSIAN GAMES are usually the subject of raised eyebrows and jokes about how functional and workmanlike they are. *4x4 Hummer* is absolutely no exception.

This is as straight down the line as you could imagine a racing game to be – completely uninspiring visuals, bland

music, average driving model, and a reasonable number of racing options – destined for a score of 50 and a general sigh of disenchantment. You can't get too angry, because there's not much inherently wrong with this game, and there's an interesting orienteering mode, essentially a trackless checkpoint



run. But there's nothing else to get excited about and plenty of frustrations, like the steel bushes and hidden mud traps. You can't even run over the spectators – getting near them triggers a time penalty rather than splattered corpses over your bonnet.

4x4 Hummer is as generic as racing gets and shouldn't really be bought by anyone other than Hummer fans.

PCZONE
50



AND THE REST...

Dirt-cheap golden nuggets we played so you didn't have to



AGATHA CHRISTIE MYSTERIES
Mastertronic, £9.99
Three appalling, dreary and uninspired adventures.

22



ONE UNIT WHOLE: BLOOD
Good Old Games, £4.08 (\$5.99)
The very first *Blood* game.
Looks rougher than Sue Barker, but it's still a mean FPS.

69



SHERLOCK HOLMES: SECRET OF THE SILVER EARRING
Gog.com, \$9.99 (£6.75)
Starts well, ends in cobbles.

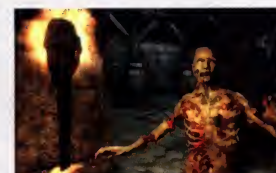
42

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET GAMES



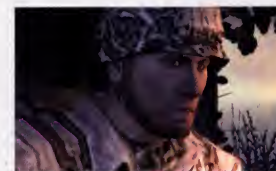
MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

£999, Steam
The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow. Buy it, if only to try out the mods.



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION GOTY

£14.99, Steam
The sequel to *Morrowind* features the massive open-world gameplay expected from *Elder Scrolls* games.



COMPANY OF HEROES

£6.99, Steam
A challenging yet fun, WWII RTS that sees you playing Axis and Allies in the days after D-Day.



PSYCHONAUTS

£5.99, Steam
You won't have more fun than this psychological platformer unless *Brütal Legend* appears on the PC.



MASS EFFECT

£12.99, Steam
The definitive space opera RPG/shooter. A must-play, especially before you start *Mass Effect 2*.

Buyer's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

PCZ TOP 5 POST-GLASNOST APOCALYPSES

- 1 STALKER SERIES**
Mysterious scientific endeavour causes chaos.
- 2 METRO 2033**
Mysterious climate change causes chaos.
- 3 SINGULARITY**
Mysterious physics experiment causes chaos.
- 4 WORLD IN CONFLICT**
Russian army invades USA, causing chaos.
- 5 HARD TRUCK APOCALYPSE**
Lots of car drivers shoot each other. Chaotically.

PCZ TOP 5 DYSMOPHIC BODY TYPES

- 1 EVERYONE IN BRINK**
Weird heads and monkey limbs.
- 2 MARCUS FENIX**
How big are his legs?
- 3 MAX PAYNE**
Weird boxy head.
- 4 DHALSIM**
Yoga's obviously bad for you.
- 5 MARIO AND LUIGI**
Maybe they were squashed as babies.



PCZ TOP 5 WAYS UBISOFT DRM COULD BE WORSE

- 1 REFORMATTING**
It could wipe your PC's hard drive.
- 2 YOU'RE NICKED**
...tell the police you've got dodgy porn on your PC.
- 3 EMBARRASSING PURCHASES**
...order Viagra from spammers.
- 4 ZAPPED!**
...make your PC electrocute you.
- 5 HERE COME THE BOMBS**
...tell the US military Osama Bin Laden is hiding under your bed.

FPS



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES

PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)
Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



LEFT 4 DEAD

PCZ Issue: 202 – 93%
The only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* provides: a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.



TEAM FORTRESS 2

PCZ Issue: 187 – 93%
Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



LEFT 4 DEAD 2
PCZ Issue: 214 – 94%
Basically, this is *Left 4 Dead* in the Deep South. Except this one has new modes, new infected, new campaigns, as well as machettes and chainsaws for some serious slice and dicing. Better than the original.



FAR CRY 2

PCZ Issue 201 – 90%
A triumph of non-linear gameplay, *Far Cry 2* offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this well-realised, you won't care.



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2

PCZ Issue: 215 – 94%
Take all of the greatest action movies of all time, stick them together, and add some semi-manufactured controversies, and you have a massive hit. Still, it's an absolutely great shooter.



BIOSHOCK
PCZ Issue: 185 – 96%
Despite the recent sequel having better gameplay, *BioShock* is still the superior game. Enter a destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmissable experience.

STRATEGY



EMPIRE: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 205 – 94%
Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best *Total War* game money can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the *Total War* series. It really is that good.



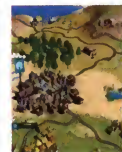
COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%
With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions *Opposing Fronts* and *Tales of Valor* keep the action coming.



WORLD IN CONFLICT

PCZ Issue: 186 – 92%
A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



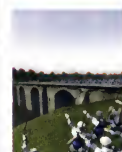
CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
A *Buyer's Guide* without a *Civ* game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs *Warlords* and *Beyond the Sword*.



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 – 91%
This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 – 91%
A blend of marial plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

ACTION/ADVENTURE



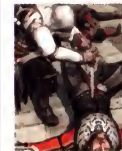
GRAND THEFT AUTO IV

PCZ Issue: 203 – 91%
We PC users have had to wait a while (OK – we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Belic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Belic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

PCZ Issue: 136 – 93%
Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with.



ASSASSIN'S CREED 2

PCZ Issue: 220 – 90%
Travel around Venice and Italy, meet Da Vinci and make friends with some prostitutes, run along walls and kill lots of people. It's Assassin's Creed, but with all of the kinks smoothed out, and plenty of depth added.



FAHRENHEIT

PCZ Issue: 159 – 90%
Murder most foul, and you're the killer. *Fahrenheit* boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



PSYCHONAUTS

PCZ Issue: 156 – 90%
Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker – *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillis is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM

PCZ Issue 213 : 89%
Proof that licensed superhero games don't have to suck, *Arkham Asylum*'s mix of action, RPG and stealth-em-up play makes it a near classic. The best *Batman* game we've ever seen.

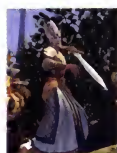
MMOs



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%
Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 182 – 87%
A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING
PCZ Issue: 200 – 92%
Mythic slips *Warhammer* into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvP'er will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 – 94%
How to make a gaming accessible to the masses. A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 – 88%
Elite Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy.

SPORT



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 88%
Every year sees another *Football Manager* appear to break up relationships across the country. But while *FM2010*'s updates mean it still holds the top spot, *Champ Man* is closing in.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 85%
The football industry may ignore PES, but PES doesn't ignore PC users. This year's PES includes updates from the console release, something that *FIFA 2010* can't claim.



NBA 2K10
PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%
Something of a niche product in the UK, this remains a fantastic sports game. Forcing you to use proper basketball tactics during matches that look like they're really on TV, *NBA 2K10* proves it's the top of its league.



FOOTBALL MANAGER LIVE
PCZ Issue: 205 – 85%
All the joy of *Football Manager* with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2010
PCZ Issue: 214 – 80%
With a new 3D match engine, and new features like the set piece creator, *Champ Man 2010* has jumped up in quality. While it still can't match *FM2010*'s depth, it's far more accessible.

SIMULATION



X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get reunited with the X Universe?



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%
While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!



THE SIMS 3
PCZ Issue: 209 – 92%
The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of gameplay lets you be a vicious diety, a benevolent dictator, or just a creepy voyeur.



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%
The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



OPERATION FLASHPOINT: DRAGON RISING
PCZ Issue: 213 – 90%
Like its peer *ArmA II*, *OpFlash 2* aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be fun, not some kind of military training aid.

DRIVING/RACING



GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%
Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2
PCZ Issue: 214 – 90%
The new rally game bearing the name of the deceased driver is a stunner. A successful mix of an arcade racer and simulator, that has most sumptuous graphics of any racer around. This sequel is going to be tough to beat.



BURNOUT PARADISE: THE ULTIMATE BOX
PCZ Issue: 205 – 89%
This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and Russell Brands.

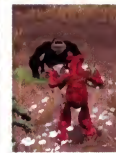


RACE DRIVER: GRID
PCZ Issue: 195 – 88%
Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like *Burnout*, but with proper tracks.



NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT
PCZ Issue: 213 – 84%
The *Need For Speed* series gets serious. Well, not too serious as the game is still weighed in the favour of fun over realism. But this is a polished release, and the best *NFS* around.

ODDBALL



SPORE
PCZ Issue: 199 – 95%
This is four charming mini-games and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO
PCZ Issue: 201 – 90%
A stroke of indie genius, *World of Goo* is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unusual and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible.



PORTAL
PCZ Issue: 187 – 89%
Ingenious and absurdly funny, *Portal* is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
The God game-like *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



BRAID
PCZ Issue: 209 – 90%
Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

ROLE-PLAYING



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.



FALLOUT 3
PCZ Issue: 201 – 91%
While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great open-world that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS
PCZ Issue: 214 – 93%
By delivering an RPG that's at once realistic, brutal, heroic, sexy and immersive, BioWare have secured their position as masters of the RPG genre. We're already eager to see what they'll do with *Dragon Age 2*.

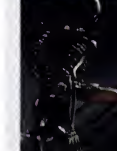


MASS EFFECT 2
PCZ Issue: 218 – 93%
Darker in tone than the original, but featuring refined... well... everything, *Mass Effect 2* is a near-perfect mix of third-person gunplay and RPG storytelling. Just make sure you play *Mass Effect* first.



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%
This is the benchmark in RPGs – if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure *Deus Ex* remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world.

LOG'S PICK



BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM
PCZ Issue 213 – 89%
I'm saying *Arkham Asylum* because I didn't want to say *World of Goo*. I love *World of Goo*, and I want 2D Boy to become ultra-billionaires riding around on diamond-eyed dragons, but I also feel I should acknowledge that it's 2010 now, and withdraw my Goo-gushing until they make a new game.
So, *Arkham Asylum*: the game I first played about 18 months ago, when a surprisingly complete preview copy fell into my hands. The game I played completely through, unable to write about half of it, because of the NDA that came with it. Still, it was a privileged feeling – it's not often you finish a game for a preview – and it actually felt slightly naughty, like I was getting more than I deserved.
But it was well-judged for Rocksteady. By the time I got to do my interviews and write the preview, I was already 100% sold on their treatment of the caped bastard, and was desperate to write the actual review.
Well, that never happened – I never ended up reviewing *Arkham Asylum* for anyone. So those hours spent in the house, desperately telling an uninterested housemate that I was Batman, and he had to come and look, because I was being Batman on the telly, can remain a pure memory for me. Batman... I never had to give you a score. This love transcends percentages. Give us a cuddle.

STEVE'S PICK



GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue 179 – 88%
If you want to play *Garry's Mod* on some of the game's more interesting servers (the Goonie Goo Gun servers are where you'll find the most amazing contraptions, in my opinion) you'll have to download about 4GB worth of content. This includes basic building blocks (something missing from the cache of Source-engine models shipped with *Garry's Mod*) as well as things like gears (which work as they should), railings along which spheres can roll, bits of jet planes and other very specifically useful objects.
You'll also be downloading maps. One of which turns *Garry's Mod* into a space-combat arena, replete with planets you can fly between and explore, some with inhospitable atmospheres, others covered in ice, and all capable of being built on. See if you can construct a spacecraft that can not only deliver you safely to the planet surfaces, but also protects you from the horror-vacuum of space. Or, if you're rubbish at building, simply watch other players carefully and purposefully bolting their inventions together. It's a relaxing pursuit.
Guides (and a way of easily downloading that broad range of crap you'll need before you can play online) can be found at ggg.bottlabs.org – though if you can't be bothered with any of that, I implore you to just play about offline with the default gubbins. Even if it's all you can do to put Alyx in sexy poses.

INCOMING!

Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to page 22 for the full run-down.



MAMA & **Rock**
FESTIVALS PRESENT
HIGH VOLTAGE
FESTIVAL

SATURDAY 24 JULY 2010

SUNDAY 25 JULY 2010

MAIN
STAGE



heaven & hell
A Tribute to Ronnie James Dio

FOREIGNER
GARY MOORE



THE UNION



JOE ELLIOTT
& VERY SPECIAL GUEST
IAN HUNTER
DOWN 'N' OUTZ
JOE BONAMASSA
BACHMAN & TURNER
UFO • THE QUIREBOYS

**Black Label
Society**

SAXON
CATHEDRAL • HAMMERFALL
ORANGE GOBLIN
BLACK SPIDERS • NEW DEVICE

HAMMER
STAGE



HIGH ON FIRE
AUDREY HORNE • LETHARGY

PROG STAGE

TRANSATLANTIC
ASIA

DWEEZIL ZAPPA
BIGELF • FOCUS
PENDRAGON
TOUCHSTONE

marillion
ARGENT

URIAH HEEP
(PERFORMING DEMONS & WIZARDS)
MAGNUM • STEVE HACKETT
MARTIN TURNER'S WISHBONE ASH
(PERFORMING ARGUS)
THE REASONING

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PCZONE

Hardware

Better gaming through technology

A DEAD CAT

I HAVE A friend whose curiosity often gets the better of him, to the extent that he ends up doing things common sense tells the rest of us we'd be daft to even contemplate.

Years ago, he drove into a deep ford to see if his car would "work while submersed". I was in the car at the time, and as we approached the turbulent waters I suggested (while assuming a brace position) that H₂O would not only enter the block and make new shapes out of his pistons, it would also enter the car and make us wet. Still, I've had duller evenings.

Recently he bought two Radeons and recounted his exploits with them. He couldn't resist slotting them home without the bridge in place, then with two bridges connected. Off goes the power to one. Then a finger is held in the other's fan to see which alarm sounds first. Finally he tries to overclock the cards in opposite directions. Again, for no other reason other than to see what happens.

This friend is not an idiot (honestly). He's just unnecessarily questioning of everything, and it's him I turn to whenever I need to ask a strange question that might, were I to confirm the answer myself, blow my face off.

"Ever dropped a screwdriver into a PC while it's powered up?"

"Oh yes," he says. "Makes a right proper bang."

So now you know. Don't drop tools into your PC's case when it's on.

Wandy

Phil Wand
Hardware editor

LAP OF HONOUR

Republic of Gamers 3D laptop wins two awards at COMPUTEX Taipei

THE G51 3D - A gaming laptop ASUS claims is the world's first 3D-ready notebook - was named "Best Choice of Year" and "Best Choice" overall in its category at the COMPUTEX exhibition in Taiwan.

Sold in the UK as the G51Jx 3D and costing around £1,600, the ROG laptop has a Core i7 720QM, GeForce GTS 360M 1GB, 640GB hard drive, 8GB DDR3 RAM and 15.6in TFT with 'Color Shine' technology. This supposedly delivers exceptional images with enhanced colour density and saturation (ie is one of those glossy numbers).

Other features include an integrated two megapixel camera, Bluetooth, Altec Lansing speakers and keyboard that



Best Choice! For what and by whom we don't know.

illuminates, assuming it's dark and you need help finding it. The laptop comes with Windows 7 Home Premium 64bit and you won't be shocked to hear that ASUS provide three dozen stupidly named tools such as 'Power4Gear Hybrid' and 'Fancy Start' with it.

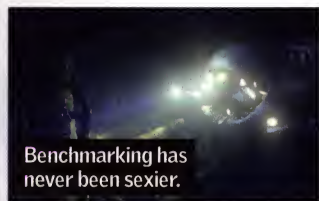
Support for 3D comes courtesy of NVIDIA's 3D Vision technology, a pair of active shutter glasses and a 120Hz refresh rate. The problem is the 15.4in, LED backlit panel has a native resolution of 1366x768, meaning a less than exciting pixel density and half the resolution of a modern HD desktop screen. 3D or not, it's unlikely to do recent games any real justice.
uk.asus.com

SCORE BORED

Futuremark release DX11 measurer

FUTUREMARK HAVE RELEASED a YouTube video of their latest benchmark tool, *3DMark 11*, at work excitingly entitled "Deep Sea Trench Video".

As its name suggests, the new *3DMark* is a DirectX 11 product designed to sound all the bells and whistles of the underwhelming DX11. That means tessellation for more polygons, multi-threading for better performance on processors with several cores, and the one everyone forgets, compute shaders - basically, a way of allowing games to tap into the power of modern cards for tasks other than rendering scenes (like a physics engine for example).



Benchmarking has never been sexier.

The video shows a benchmark video test that, as usual, has no sense of humour and fails to tickle any kind of emotion.

Also as a result of it being sponsored by MSI, this video also looks like an MSI advert.
futuremark.com

NEWS ROUND-UP

LENOVO'S IDEAPAD NOTEBOOK, the first laptop to feature the company's *VeriFace* face recognition software, allows you to login to your PC by simply sitting in front of it: your mug shot is your password. Failed login attempts by other people are recorded along with audio. You may recall HP shipping face recognition with some of its machines last year, the software failing to see black users and being labelled racist.
lenovo.com/uk

TO ROUND OFF A page dominated by laptop stories, here's one about Fujitsu. The Japanese company has announced a product range featuring gesture control. This lets you use the PC by waving your hands in front of the screen. Why you'd want to do this, when you can simply move them down a few inches and use the keyboard, isn't yet understood.
fujitsu.com/uk

WARNING:
THIS MONTH'S
HARD WORDS

BY JON 'LOC' BLYTH

GESTURE CONTROL: Uses video cameras and motion recognition algorithms to enable you to control a PC without touching it, and pretend you're Tom Cruise in a let-down of a sci-fi movie. **IDEAPAD:** A large, comfortable velvet cushion used by obscenely wealthy technocrats (like the Google Guys, Bill Gates and Steve Jobs) to rest fragile concepts on how they can dominate the world and make us pay for the privilege, until they're needed. **WINDOWS VISTA:** An OS that was installed by millions of unwitting Windows 7 beta testers, and should never have left its Ideapad. **POLYMER:** An aquatic parrot that lives in the waters around France's oversea territories.

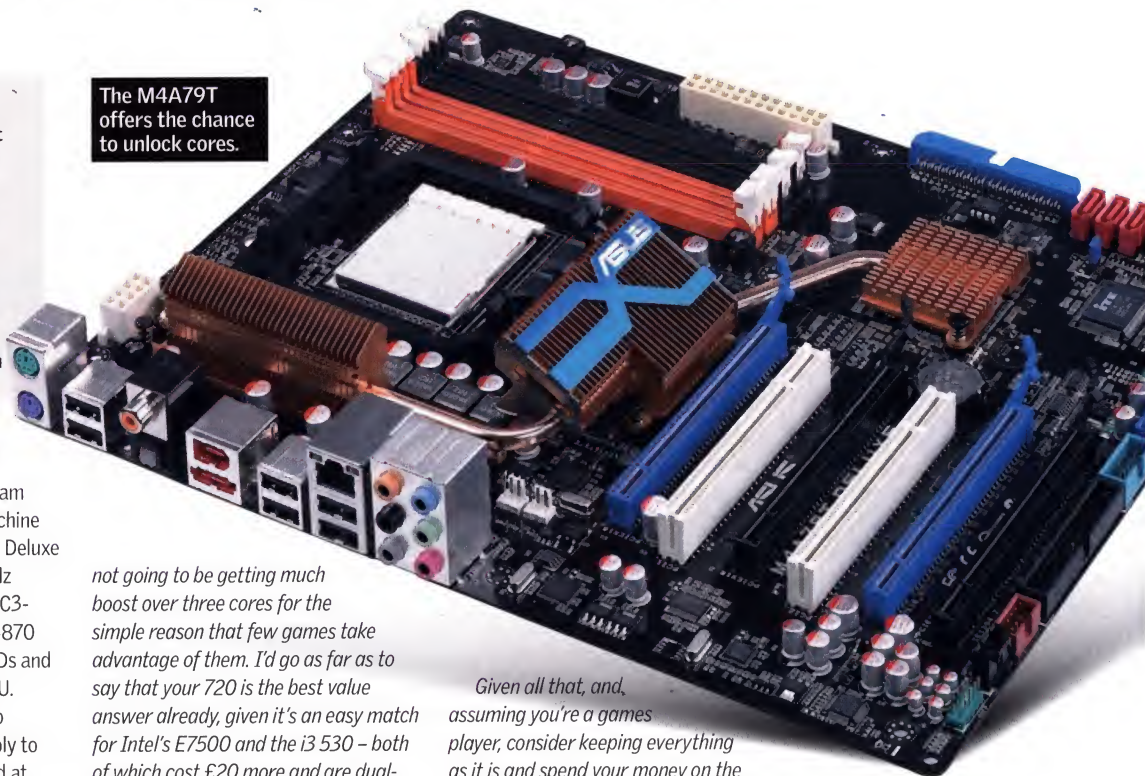
Dear Wendy

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...

PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *World of Warcraft* so long your partner's left you? Wendy can't help with those setbacks, but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wendy knows all, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including details about your problem and system specs.

The M4A79T offers the chance to unlock cores.



Q TRIPLE JUMP

I have a gaming PC and am thinking of upgrading it. The machine currently has an ASUS M4A79T Deluxe board, Phenom II X3 720 2.8GHz (overclocked to 3.51GHz), 4GB PC3-12800 RAM and a Radeon HD 4870 512MB. The system has five HDDs and is fed by a Corsair 620W HX PSU.

I want to upgrade the CPU to a Phenom II X6 1090T, the supply to a Corsair 850W HX modular and at some later date the graphics card to a Radeon 5870 1GB.

My question is, will the 850W be enough? Keep in mind I also want to overclock the processor to at least 4GHz. My budget for the moment is around £400.

Sdacompany

A If you're a gamer, you should rethink your plans. The six-core 1090T is an alluring chip, but unless you use your PC for transcoding then you're

not going to be getting much boost over three cores for the simple reason that few games take advantage of them. I'd go as far as to say that your 720 is the best value answer already, given it's an easy match for Intel's E7500 and the i3 530 – both of which cost £20 more and are dual-rather than triple-core designs.

Add in the fact that your ASUS board has Advanced Clock Calibration –

Given all that, and, assuming you're a games player, consider keeping everything as it is and spend your money on the graphics instead. You could either go for the £350 Radeon HD 5870 or arrange two £110 HD 5750s or two £150 HD

"Keep everything as it is and spend your money on the graphics"

and so might be able to expose a fourth core – and I'm even keener to save you money. Though, from the way you've overclocked your setup I suspect you've tried this and have decided that at £245 the X6 is a good long-term choice and, when tweaked past 4GHz, will blow the 720 away regardless of core count.

To answer your question then, AMD's Turbo CORE system, which adjusts core speeds automatically depending on their loads, should mean that with factory settings the X6 1090T will be no more juicy than a fiercely clocked X3 720, and even with your plans to breach 4GHz I don't see it stressing your Seasonic-made PSU. In addition, the Radeon 5870 doesn't need more than a 500W supply, even two in CrossFire remain within 600W.

5770s in CrossFire – either of which represent a significant cost saving that you could use to consolidate your hard drives. When £99 buys you 2TB, nobody needs multiple HDDs any more.



At just £159, the i5 750 makes a lot of computer sense.

Q CORE RESPONSIVE

I'm currently considering my options in regards to upgrading.

I'm happy with my GTX 280 graphics card, but feel I need to replace my D975XB2 motherboard and E6850 CPU. I've put aside money for Windows 7 and want to spend between £500-£600 on a new Core i5 or i7 and a motherboard.

I've always been an Intel fanboy but would take the AMD route if it meant better performance. My other components include a TPQ-850 PSU and Sound Blaster X-Fi Fatal1ty.

Michael Richards

A If you've had a look at the number of new Intel motherboards on sale right now, there's every chance you've come away with your head spinning.

My suggestion would be to spend £159 on a Core i5 750, £69 on GIGABYTE's GA-H55M-S2H, and £80 on 4GB Crucial CT25664BA1339 RAM.

DRIVER WATCH

GRAPHICS

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
ATI	CATALYST 10.5	26 May 10
NVIDIA	Force Ware 197.75	10 May 10

SOUND

MANU	DESC	RELEASED
Creative	X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004	30 Jul 08
Creative	Creative Alchemy 1.20.04	01 Aug 08
Creative	Audigy Beta 2.18.0001	17 Jul 08

"Resist the urge to spend more on basic components, and invest in something that'll last a while"

You mentioned you have Antec's TPQ-850 power supply so that can stay, as can the Fatal1ty branded audio card and – unless you're planning some overclocking heroics – the Intel cooler that comes with the i5.

The i5 750 is arguably the best value, most flexible processor currently on sale. To go appreciably faster and feel you're getting your money's worth, you'd need to stretch to a Core i7. That isn't worth it. I built a system around the GA-H55M-S2H two months ago and it's further proof that only nutters spend more than a tonne on mobos.

As for the Crucial memory, that's a no-brainer: it's on GIGABYTE's tested list and you cannot beat the Crucial shop for customer service.

What's the total there? About £300. Resist the urge to spend more on basic components, and invest in something that'll last a while, like a solid state drive or perhaps HP's luscious ZR24w monitor, which I talk about below.

Q SCREEN PLAY

I'm looking to spend between £350 and £400 on a monitor but don't know where I should start.



HP's latest top quality S-IPS all rounder, the £349 ZR24w.

What should I be looking for?

What are the specifications that matter and why? I've trawled a million reviews on the web and, frankly, I am none the wiser for it.

I've recently been incapacitated by a work accident and don't fancy the idea of shopping for one in stores. Not only do I dislike the experience, but the high street doesn't have anything like the variety as online stores. Your help is appreciated!

A Jones

A What you need to do is step away from other people's opinions and benchmarks and make a list of what features you actually need. I don't know whether you glide up to your workstation in a wheelchair or plonk yourself down into a seat, but either way height adjustment is mandatory here.

You should also look for tilt (ie back/forward) and swivel (ie left/right) adjustments too, but the likelihood is that a monitor which allows you to change the viewing height will also allow you to adjust its angle as well. This can be vital if you intend buying more than one display and arranging them in a bank, because having a fully adjustable base means not needing to move each monitor into place on the desk but merely wiggle their screens.

Most people don't need the screen portion to pivot (rotate through 90°), but in the event you do, make sure that's on your checklist. Personally, I don't need pivot but my experience is that any screen offering it will also have a more solid, very sturdy base in order to support the feature – and if you have a joystick or wheel attached to your desk there's nothing worse for gaming than a wibbly-wobbling screen.

ALL ABOUT...

29 SONY EXPLODING BATTERIES

Once a name you could implicitly trust, Sony is now a name that is associated with batteries that explode when you used them.

This wasn't just a problem for Sony. In the summer of 2006, Dell was forced to replace more than four million laptop cells – at the time the largest tech recall in history – that had shipped with Sony batteries inside them.

In the following months, Toshiba, Fujitsu, Sharp, Acer, HP, Apple and others recalled many millions more, and by the end of the year close to 10 million lithium-ion batteries with a Sony logo had been replaced.

What had gone wrong? Li-ion batteries contain thin layers of incredibly thin polymer separators that are wound tightly to form cells. If contaminants such as metal fragments get into the battery, the anode and cathode form a hard short, and when that happens you get fireworks. Literally. The more cells packed into batteries, and the greater their capacity is, the prettier the display.

Sony made changes to the way their batteries were made, but we can only guess at how many customers didn't hear about or plain ignored the recall. It's the best reason to always fill out your registration card.



A Dell laptop detonating.

On the subject of pivoting, be careful when browsing retailer catalogues, because I've noticed a surprisingly large number of products advertised as being 'pivot' when what the seller really means is "swivel", or as having "swivel pivot height adjust" when they don't do anything of the sort. Ebuyer describes Iiyama's Z209HDS as having "tilt swivel pivot height adjust" yet it only tilts. I should know, I'm looking at one now.

On to USB support. A lot of screens have ports on them – some in awkward places – but few people actually use them. Which is a shame, because if you have an integrated, powered USB 2.0 hub built into your screen with a minimum of four ports, you no longer need to stretch down to your PC or fumble round the back for a free hole in which to push your keyboard, mouse, pen drive or mobile phone cable.

When it comes to inputs you really need a monitor that covers as many bases as possible: that means look for DisplayPort or HDMI, plus DVI-D and VGA connectors, and HDCP support. At all costs avoid the numerous super-cheap product variants that omit digital inputs and simply provide VGA.

Lastly, with your budget you should be sure to buy an IPS (in-plane switching) device. This is a recent, improved panel type that gives a much wider viewing angle and a faster refresh rates, which is great for gaming. While this isn't a feature of IPS displays as such, it is safe to say that any screen built around this technology (or a variant) won't be slow.

My suggestion would be HP's new ZR24w which, at £349, not only fits within your budget, but provides every one of your must-have features. **PCZ**

FORUMS:
DIRECT FROM
DEARWANDY.COM

(liamstfc) My brother wrecked his PC's wireless network card and has tasked me with sourcing a new one. Can anyone recommend one? (bsoltan) Unless you need anything fancy they're going to perform pretty similar. The D-Link AirPlus-G DWL-G510 Wireless PCI Adapter is just £17 from Ebuyer. (Pooeypants) Can you tell us what OS and router he's using? Some cards have compatibility issues. (liamstfc) He's on Windows XP 32-bit, the router is a standard Orange Home Broadband box which works perfectly fine. (Wandy) I have had two D-Link DWL-G510s working for years. I would say, having moved to powerline networking (ie HomePlug) anything wireless seems flaky by comparison.

MULTI-CORE CPUs

We don't rely on one game when benchmarking. *Far Cry 2* is extremely demanding on a graphics card, making it ideal for DX10 frame rate tests. *DiRT 2* was one of the first DirectX 11 games, so we use it to check the performance of DX11-capable systems. On the other hand *World in Conflict* demands as much from a CPU than a graphics card.

PC SPECIALIST FUSION HDX 965

PRICE £900 MANUFACTURER PC Specialist WEBSITE pcspecialist.co.uk

SPECIFICATION

PROCESSOR	3.4GHz AMD Phenom II X4 965
MOTHERBOARD	ASUS M4A77T
GRAPHICS CARD	ATI HD 5870
RAM	4GB 1600MHz DDR3
STORAGE	750GB HDD
OS	Windows 7 Home Premium 64-bit

deal of the Core i5 or i7's performance is down to Hyper-threading, which most PC games don't support. That's at best – the performance of some games is actively hindered by Hyper-threading. This handicap means the Phenom II can keep up with similar Core i5 and i7 chips. And really, as is usual in gaming PCs, it's really the graphics card that does most of the grunt work.

That said, the Yoyotech Warbird does get close to the Fusion's performance, so you end up with a conundrum. In gaming terms you're only dropping single-digit frame rates when using the Warbird. But it isn't supplied with *Windows*, so you'll end up paying the same price for that PC and an OS as you would for the Fusion, which comes with *Windows*. In processing terms though, the Core i5 is a generation ahead of AMD's best and the 1156 socket should give you a modicum of future-proofing.

That said, the Fusion doesn't come overclocked, so some tweaking could push these figures up (theoretically, the CPU could reach 4GHz). However, the 965 just doesn't have the headroom you'd need to match a Core i5. In sub-£1,000 terms then, the Warbird still has our vote, but if you've got a little more cash then Cryo's Quad i5 has the aspirational end sewn up. **DJ**

BENCHMARKS

FPS @ 2560 X 1600

	FUSION	WARBIRD	CRYO
FAR CRY 2	48	40	48
COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2 *	41	38	62
WORLD IN CONFLICT *	40	34	42

* DirectX 11 * DirectX 10

Circles of yellow make for a colourful PC case.

THINGS ARE GETTING crowded at the £1,000 price point. A couple of months ago saw Yoyotech releasing the Warbird i750 – an £800 Core i5/HD 5850 PC – and last month saw Cryo reaping the rewards of placing a HD 5870 card in a similarly specced rig (Cryo Quad i5, issue 221, 90%). This month, PC Specialist launched a full AMD rig to take them both on.

The key to the Fusion HDX 965 is the HD 5870 humming away in the depths

of the surprisingly colourful In Win chassis. The card's the component that garners the impressive benchmark stats, and marks this machine out as a high quality, mid-range gaming rig. But it's the other AMD components sitting inside this PC that enable PC Specialist to hit graphical heights and still keep the Fusion's price down.

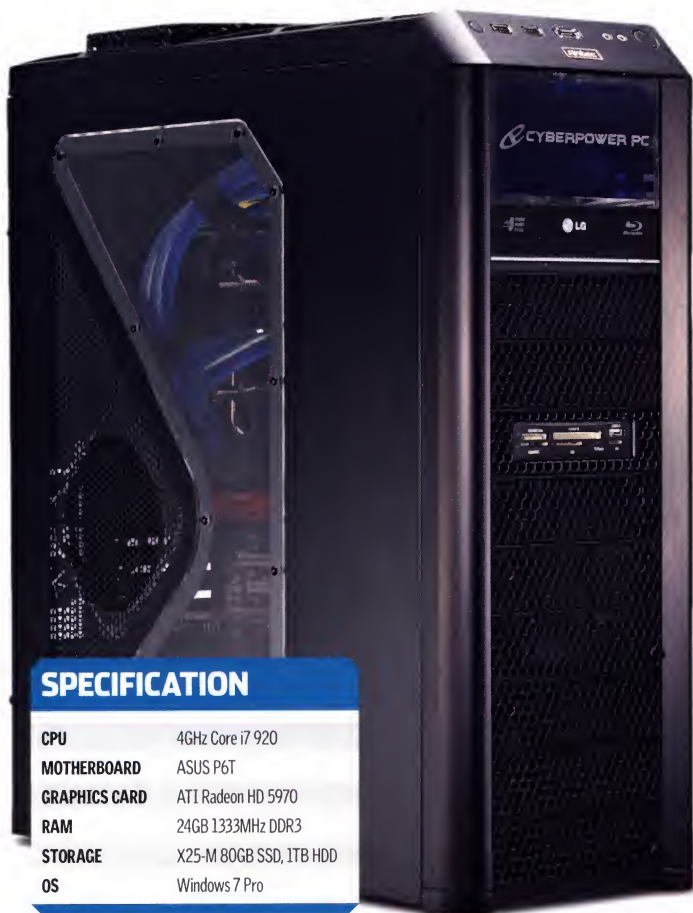
The Phenom II X4 965 (one of AMD's top CPUs) costs less than £150, which frees up a lot of money compared to if an equivalent Intel processor was

used instead. And the AMD 770 chipset motherboard is another bargain too.

While using a Phenom II CPU instead of a Core i5 keeps the price down, it causes a massive performance hit on anything that's remotely CPU-intensive. Due to its Hyper-threading capabilities a Phenom II looks like a midget with a limp compared to the long-legged Core i5 sprinter, in straight quad-to-quad tests.

But for a games machine, this isn't a great problem. To start with, a great





CYBERPOWER INFINITY I7 PHOENIX

PRICE £2,800 MANUFACTURER CyberPower WEBSITE cyberpowersystem.co.uk

THIS PC WILL take whatever you throw at it, whether you're gaming or remaking *Avatar*.

At £2,800 it's a huge outlay, but it's got enough power with a 4GHz Bloomfield Core i7, more RAM than you'll ever really need, a lightning-fast solid-state boot drive, and the fastest graphics card around.

Having a X25-M SSD as the boot drive gives an enormous boost over hard drive-based solutions. This and the 24GB RAM means that the Phoenix is lightning quick. But the RAM can be cut in half without impacting performance too much, especially if faster memory is used.

The choice of graphics card is a disappointment. The difference in cost between two HD 5870 and a dual-GPU HD 5970 is negligible, but the performance difference is huge. As using the dual-GPU HD 5970

BENCHMARKS

FPS @ 2560 X 1600	
FAR CRY 2	72
COLIN MCRAE: DIRT 2 *	54
WORLD IN CONFLICT *	61
* DirectX 11 * DirectX 10	

means dealing with CrossFire anyway, it's worth spending the extra on two of HD 5870 and getting much faster gaming performance.

The Phoenix is immaculately tidy inside and stress-tested to make sure the setup's stable.

We recommend customising it with 12GB of 1,800MHz RAM and twin HD 5870s, as you'll save over £200 on the list price and still have a formidable PC. **DJ**

PCZONE
85

SPECIFICATION

CPU	4GHz Core i7 920
MOTHERBOARD	ASUS P6T
GRAPHICS CARD	ATI Radeon HD 5970
RAM	24GB 1333MHz DDR3
STORAGE	X25-M 80GB SSD, 1TB HDD
OS	Windows 7 Pro

OVERCLOCKERS CORE I3 OVERCLOCKED

PRICE £339 MANUFACTURER Overclockers UK WEBSITE overclockers.co.uk

WE'RE SEEING AN increasing number of factory overclocked rigs coming from system integrators. These deliver better performances than their stock components can deliver out of their boxes, and come with warranties that give you the protection you don't get when DIY overclocking, and the reassurance of them being stress tested, so you'll know they systems will continue to work for the foreseeable future.

The Core i3 Overclocked package isn't a full system though. Rather it's a set of overclocked components tested as being able to work together. However, storage devices, graphics cards and power supplies can make a big difference to how an overclocked system works.

Overclockers UK have tweaked a 2.93GHz Core i3 CPU so it runs at 4GHz. That's when it works. The first



Want an overclocked PC? Then buy the whole thing.

time we tried it, our test PC stuttered and booted at stock speeds. It did run Windows after many aborted attempts to POST and trips into the BIOS.

Overclockers UK guarantee stability, but only with systems using a 'quality brand PSU', so if they believe

yours isn't from a good enough brand they may not honour that promise. There's also a problem in that you won't be able to update the BIOS without invalidating the warranty.

There's little safety in picking up an overclocking bundle. You save £3 on the listed price of the components, but

the rest of your PC might take umbrage at these boosted parts. A full overclocked system will work out of the box and won't give you the problems you could get with using a bundle like this one. **DJ**

PCZONE
54

REMEMBER:
DETER ANIMALS
GETTING INSIDE
YOUR PC

Taking care of your PC doesn't just mean cleaning out the hard drive: it also means cleaning out inside the PC itself. Getting rid of dust and bits of food using a can of compressed air avoids this happening bit.ly/miceinpc, which avoids the need for this bit.ly/pcmousecatcher.

Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear – both expensive and cheap

LOADED?

GRAPHICS

ASUS RADEON HD 5970

PRICE £499
uk.asus.com

The Radeon HD 5970 is the world's fastest video card, making it an obvious choice for this slot. Under that plastic shroud are two AMD RV870 GPUs, whose 4.3 billion transistors and 3,200 shader processors knock the GeForce GTX 295 out of the stadium and into the car park. Despite all this power it's not even particularly noisy when under load. If you have one of these cards you'll need at least a 600W PSU. Add another and you'll need 1KW.



PROCESSOR

INTEL CORE I7 975

PRICE £770
intel.com



The most extreme, most unlocked edition of Intel's quad core, multithreading flagship processor laughs at all modern games. The only reason not to get one is the imminent Core i7 980X, which will have six Hyper-Threading cores and 12MB Smart Cache and be even more jaw-droppingly stunning.

SCREEN

HP LP2475W

PRICE £450
hp.co.uk



You can buy a 24in widescreen monitor for £150 these days. So why would you want this one? Simple: professional H-IPS screen technology, two DVI-I ports, DisplayPort, HDMI, six USB ports, height adjust, rotate, swivel and tilt, plus 1920 x 1200 pixels to stare at. Why not buy two?

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS RAMPAGE II EXTREME

PRICE £259
uk.asus.com



ASUS claim the Rampage II Extreme is the "ultimate overclocking board", and looking at the design and specification it's hard to find a more attention-grabbing mobo. It has a massive array of tweaking tools, and you get a SupremeFX daughterboard with a X-Fi processor thrown in.

SOUND CARD

AUZENTECH X-FI FORTE 7.1

PRICE £119
auzentech.com



There was a time when you couldn't build a PC without a Sound Blaster. Today it's all handled by mobos and only fruitcakes buy discrete hardware. Oh really? The Forte is mad for games like nothing else: Dolby Digital Live, DTS Connect, even headphone and mic amps. Proper stuff.

HDD

WESTERN DIGITAL CAVIAR BLACK 2TB

PRICE £220
westerndigital.com



Forget solid state for a moment: we're after a data tanker that'll swallow music, movies and your *Steam* folder. For that there's only one choice: the WD2001FAS. Don't be fooled into thinking that large drives are slower than smaller ones. This 2TB model is top of the HDD benchmarks.

SPEAKERS

LOGITECH Z-5500

PRICE £249
logitech.co.uk



We've been advocating Logitech's THX flagship since it was launched in 2005, and although the silver plastic does tend to make it look a little dated alongside new rivals, the simple fact is that great sound never goes out of fashion. Nothing rivals the Z-5500s at this price.

SKINT?

GRAPHICS

SAPPHIRE RADEON HD 5750 VAPOR-X

PRICE £115
sapphiretech.com

While you could save yourself the cost of a game and buy NVIDIA's GTS 250, Sapphire's HD 5750 is faster, almost silent (courtesy of Vapor-X tech) and brings cool technology within reach of most gamers. Features such as DX11 support, ATI Eyefinity and DisplayPort connectivity simply aren't available on any GeForce. And thanks to CrossFire, the upgrade path is obvious: buy the same card twice.



PROCESSOR

AMD PHENOM II X4 955 BLACK

PRICE £122
amd.com



With the faster 965 Black at £139 and Core i5-750 at £152, spending that extra £30 on Intel's little belter will sure put a wider grin on your face. But when £30 could buy your hard drive or a set of speakers, and you're on a tight budget, it has to be the Phenom.

MOTHERBOARD

GIGABYTE GA-MA770-UD3

PRICE £49
gigabyte.com.tw



Available for less than £50, GIGABYTE's GA-MA770-UD3 supports AMD's most recent AM3 processors including the Athlon II and Phenom II X4, X3, and X2, and DDR3 RAM of up to 1,666MHz. It also features RAID and onboard eight-channel HD audio, but there's no CrossFire support.

HDD

SEAGATE BARRACUDA 500GB

PRICE £33
seagate.com

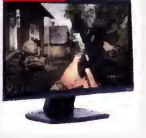


Seagate's 12th generation ST3500418AS drive costs peanuts, but a decent capacity means it'll cater for most media collections and a nod to the enthusiast market means it'll turn out some of the best benchmarks going. There are good reasons why it's the world's most popular desktop drive.

SCREEN

IYYAMA PROLITE E2208HDS-2

PRICE £134
iyyama.co.uk



Cheap and unknown brands are often tempting, but many are based around yesterday's technology and won't support connections more exotic than a 15-pin analogue VGA. Which is why we'd go for this 22in Iiyama, with DVI-D, full HD resolution and integrated speakers.

SOUND CARD

NONE

PRICE £0
N/A



If you're strapped for cash, the last thing you want to be wasting money on is a sound card. It's simply not necessary. Every mainstream motherboard on sale today offers multi channel audio, so hook up your speakers there instead. You'll never notice the difference.

SPEAKERS

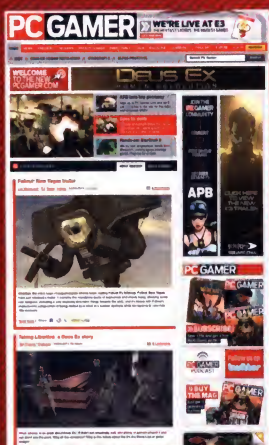
LOGITECH X-210

PRICE £25
logitech.co.uk



Another win for Logitech, a brand people still associate with mice. The X-210s are great value, and despite looking and feeling every inch the £25 speaker set, deliver sub-assisted audio that transcends their budget status. At this price you might find classier speakers, but never a more classy sound.

SMARTER COOKIES ENABLED



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PCZONE

Freeplay

Mods, maps and free things!

CHEAP SEATS

THE FREE-TO-PLAY ROUTE is something that more MMO developers are looking at, in the face of the unwinnable battle that comes from competing directly with the *World of Warcraft* juggernaut.

Look at *Lord of the Rings Online*: next to *WOW*, *LOTRO* is one of the most successful MMOs out. Based on a killer license and with hundreds of thousands of loyal players, you'd think that'd be a satisfying enough result for Turbine. But it seems that it wasn't enough.

This is a strange thing to get your head around – charging nothing for your game seems to be the best way to make a profit on it. The renewed success of *Dungeons & Dragons Online* after it went free-to-play, and renamed itself *Eberron Unlimited*, might have far more of an impact on the scene than could've been imagined. How *LOTRO*'s change to free-to-play is to be handled is the interesting question: will Turbine plough their customers with ludicrous payment options or be kind and gentle à la *D&DO*?

Naturally, the welfare of your good selves is paramount here – we're not going to advocate you bend over, drop 'em and prepare to be penetrated by the MMO anal police, and pay for the privilege. The *D&DO* scheme is what we want to see, and it seems that Turbine are going to be generous with their payment plans.

Of course, this could all go wrong the second I commit these words to print, but them's the breaks of print journalism. Write me lots of hate mail if I prove to be wrong. Or any mail at all: that'd be good too.

David Brown
Staff writer

FRODO'S FREEBIES

LOTRO goes free-to-play, world blinks with surprise

WEBSITE lotro.com

THIS MMO HAS won awards, and it's jostling for number one position behind the otherwise-untouchable *World of Warcraft*, has hundreds of thousands of regular players and new expansions continually appearing. Really *Lord of the Rings Online* couldn't really be in a healthier place, yet it's the first full-on major subscription-based MMO to make the jump into the free-to-play arena.

This is happening because of *Dungeons & Dragons Online*. This MMO seemed to be heading for destruction until the decision was taken to make it free-to-play, while offering players the chance to buy optional items for real-world cash, or to subscribe for more benefits. Suddenly, it was booming again (relatively). New players were coming in,

and the community had returned to vibrancy. Other, older MMOs were expected to follow suit, but nobody expected *LOTRO* to move to free-to-play status. It was a major shock.

FREE, BUT NOT

What exactly has been done and what does 'free' actually mean in *LOTRO*? In this case, the currency will be Turbine Points, which can be bought for cash or earned, in limited amounts, by playing the game. Level up your character through adventuring and you'll be able to cash in your points for items in stores, or use them to get expansion packs, "premium content," potions, character tweaking options and so on.

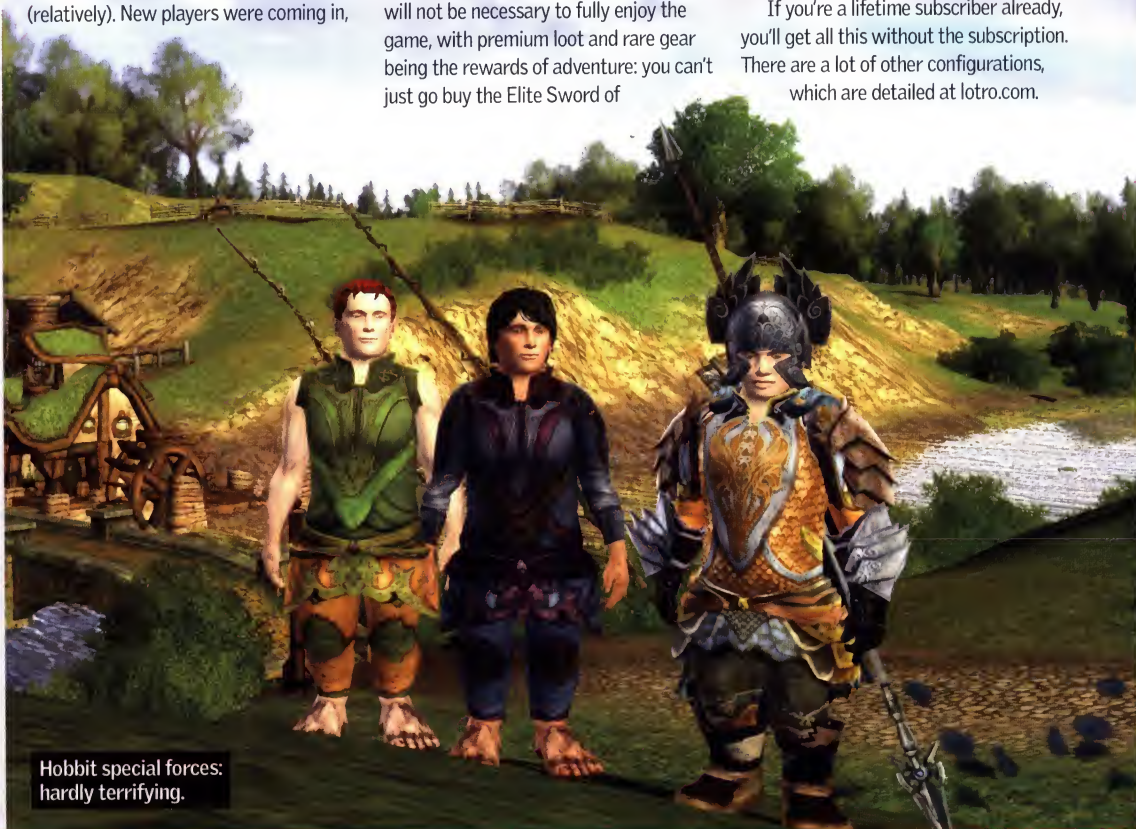
Turbine say that the buying of items will not be necessary to fully enjoy the game, with premium loot and rare gear being the rewards of adventure: you can't just go buy the Elite Sword of

Y'zswwwwtah from a trader, you have to earn it. Like *Need for Speed: World's* proposed system (issue 222), purchases are primarily designed to allow lower-level players to boost themselves so they're able to go on quests with their higher level buddies.

Once you've bought something with Turbine points, you're upgraded to Premium status, given two more character slots, allowed to carry up to five gold, as well as higher login priorities, and full mail and chat options.

You can go further. Upgrading to VIP status is like paying for a subscription, but gives you 500 Turbine Points per month to spend, priority access to servers, five character slots per server, a 20-slot wardrobe, and so on.

If you're a lifetime subscriber already, you'll get all this without the subscription. There are a lot of other configurations, which are detailed at lotro.com.



Hobbit special forces:
hardly terrifying.

PCZONE
FREE-O-METER



0
HOURS

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



295
HOURS*

SNIPPETS

Claude: This piece is a cake-walk!
You should take her on an island vacation instead.

1 / 10

MUSIC TO YOUR EYES

bit.ly/compositionpiece

Composition Piece tells the story of a maestro who's trapped in a world of long-dead composers while writing a score for the girl of his dreams. This complex backstory is just a setting for a straightforward platformer.



HAMMER TO FALL

moddb.com/mods/the-warp

Goodbye Brotherhood of Steel, hello Space Marines. *WARP* is a work-in-progress total conversion for *Fallout 3* that replaces the in-game factions with those from *Warhammer 40,000*.



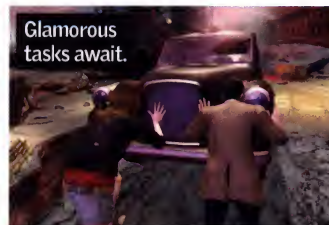
ALWAYS USE PROTECTION

bit.ly/protectmeknight

Mamotte Knight, aka *Protect Me Knight*, is a cutesy Japanese tower defence game with a smattering of RPG elements thrown in, where you have to protect your princess against swathes of ugly monsters.



On your marks.



DOCTOR, DOCTOR

Which Baker is the new *Doctor Who* game: Tom or Colin?

WEBSITE bbc.co.uk/doctorwho/dwtheadventuregames

EVER SINCE CHRISTOPHER Ecclestone stepped out of the TARDIS back in 2005 there's been a new *Doctor Who* game on the cards. It's only surprising that it has taken this long for one to finally surface (we don't count *Top Trumps: Doctor Who*). Yet even when *Doctor Who: The Adventure Games* were unveiled, the announcement came with a couple of further revelations.

question is whether it stacks up against other point-and-click games.

The story is entertaining enough for a first attempt, even if the Daleks have been used to exhaustion: all fondly-held childhood fears of them obliterated by the fact that the Doctor can overcome millions of the overgrown pepper-pots without so much as loosening his bow tie.

A few duff jokes aside, the game is pretty well written, and there's a

relatively sparse puzzles are more over-prescribed than Michael Jackson.

The majority of the game is spent evading the Daleks in stealth sections that are both cumbersome and overused, and manage to become repetitive despite the game being approximately an hour long. The visuals are a bit ropey too, akin to a PlayStation 2 *FIFA* game, although Karen Gillan and Matt Smith are well rendered – Smith's massive face especially so, which I suppose is a small (or indeed, large) consolation.

City of the Daleks isn't a complete disaster, and if you're a *Doctor Who* fan you'll probably enjoy it, but the series has a long way to go before it reaches the same quality of Telltale's games. It needs more puzzles, more exploration and less squatting behind bloody boxes.

In short, it's good *City of the Daleks* is free, because you wouldn't pay for it.

"It's good *City of the Daleks* is free, because you wouldn't pay for it"

First, the development would be undertaken by the BBC themselves at BBC Wales Interactive, and secondly, the games would be completely free.

So with the first episode – *City of the Daleks* – now available for download, the

surprisingly big (and utterly ludicrous) plot twist towards the end.

Really, it's in the gameplay where everything starts falling to pieces. The three acts are almost entirely linear, with little opportunity for exploration, and the

LORD OF THE SCROLLS

MERP gives *Oblivion* the Tolkien Treatment

WEBSITE merpmod.ning.com

HAVE YOU ALWAYS wanted to explore Middle-earth, but can't be bothered to read the books, despise Peter Jackson with a fiery passion, and are too antisocial to bother playing *Lord of the Rings Online*? This may be the answer for you.

The *Middle-earth Role-playing Project*, *MERP* for short, is a total conversion mod for *Oblivion* which replaces Bethesda's Cyrodiil with Tolkien's fantasy continent. From *The Hobbit*'s Laketown, to the Shire and the Paths of the Dead, all the major areas

visited in the books have been recreated in the *Oblivion* engine – along with many more that aren't, such as the Grey Havens. It's an ambitious project, coming complete with its own music.

MERP is still very much in the beta stages, with many areas yet to be completed. But a version is available for downloading. Even as it stands now it's mightily-impressive, particularly the areas around Hobbiton and Minas Tirith.

Getting it installed and working is a bit of a faff, but *MERP* is looking very promising indeed.



Hmm, seems familiar.

BELOW THE BELT

Multiplayer shooter *Orion* readies itself for beta

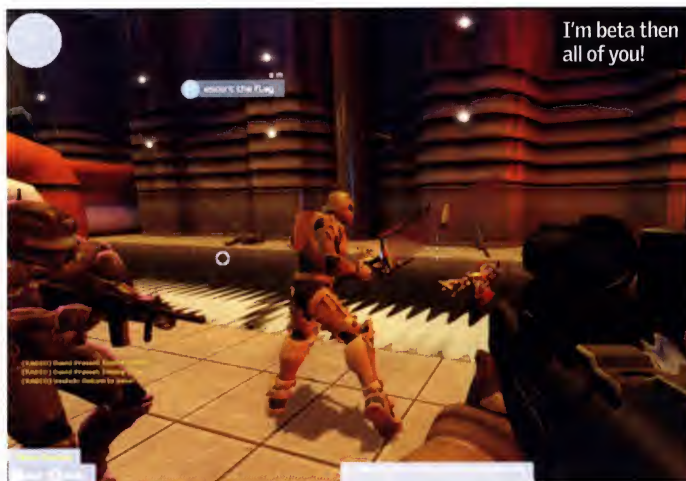
WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/orion1

THERE SEEMS TO be a recurring theme within the mentality of the modding community of late, which is that giving multiplayer FPS mods an epic backstory serves to make the game appear more than just an excuse to get incandescently angry with people you've never met before, because they filled you with bullets while bunny-hopping around your flailing carcass.

Orion is the latest in this stream of *Half-Life 2* total-conversion multiplayer mods with a backstory that reads like the blurb of an Iain M. Banks novel. Taking place 200 years in the future when the Earth has become inhospitable due to a lack of resources, a war erupts during the military colonisation of the planet Orion – the chosen alternative to the dying Earth.

The game itself pits two teams of players against each other, with three classes of soldier available in the current release: Assault, Sniper and Support. The Assault class comes equipped with a jetpack, which raises some intriguing gameplay possibilities. There are six planned game modes, though at present only Capture The Flag is available.

The mod certainly looks the part, with a sufficient array of weaponry and boasting the most detailed maps yet made with the Source engine. However, *Orion* is severely lacking in originality in both concept and game mechanics, especially if the story turns out to be as superfluous as it appears to be at this first look.



"Orion is lacking in originality in both concept and core mechanics"



PRIPYAT CALLS AGAIN

The first time was a wrong number

WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/call-of-pripyat-redux

EVER SINCE THE first *STALKER* game was released, there have been modders striving to make it ever more realistic. Now after *Oblivion Lost* for *Shadow of Chernobyl* and *Reloaded* for *Clear Sky*, *Call of Pripyat* is in the process of receiving an amateur makeover.

Redux will make some significant alterations to *Call of Pripyat*. The most important of these are a revamped economy system, enhanced enemy AI, an adjusted damage model for monsters,

and more realistic weaponry. But *Redux* isn't simply about making changes to suit the taste buds of realism enthusiasts, as the modders also intend on making additions to the game, including a whole host of new weapons and artefacts. There are also new stashes placed around the map, containing story items which will add to the lore of the Zone.



SNIPPETS



A MERE REFLECTION

mirrorsedge2d.com

EA have teamed up with indie developer Borne Games to bring you a smart 2D platformer version of *Mirror's Edge*, just in case having three dimensions was one too many for you.



A REAL MASH-UP

bit.ly/mashman

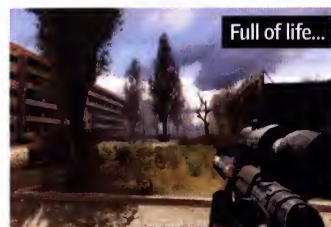
Mash Man was the greatest grape-masher in all France, until his village replaced him with a machine. Regain Mash Man's former glory in this remake of the eccentric Action 52 game.

Bug Fix of the Month



THIS MONTH
MAJOR LEAGUE
BASEBALL
2K10 1.1

"Composure is always affected on a mound visit."



Whether or not all the promised features will be present upon initial release remains to be seen, but the modding community surrounding the *STALKER* series has proved on multiple occasions that they know what they're doing, so if anything is likely to entice you to return to the Zone, *Call of Pripyat: Redux* will almost certainly be it.

Demos

David Brown tours the shiny disc



SPLIT/SECOND: VELOCITY

It's all over in a very short amount of time

WEBSITE www2.disney.co.uk/split-second-velocity

WHILE IT MIGHT look like just another arcade racing game with hilarious levels of special visual effects and sleek, phallic cars, *Split/Second: Velocity* has a trick up its sleeve.

Imagine a car is behind you, right up against your back bumper and trying to overtake. The best way to deal with the situation would be to accelerate and drive well to prevent it, right? Wrong. The best thing to do is to cause a train rolling past on the bridge nearby to suddenly derail and land on the roof of the pursuing vehicle. A nasty, squelching accident later and you're miles ahead, coasting to victory.

That's how drivers roll in *Split/Second*, using the environment to wreck their rivals' chances of winning instead of using skill and ability. And that's the excuse we use when other people beat us at it. It's all because they caused a building to collapse in front of us, not because they were better. No, no, no, la la la etc.

PROBLEM ZONE

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any error messages that came up, and your system's details.
4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

We can only provide assistance with technical problems directly related to our cover DVD. The PCZONE discs have been tested and certified virus free by an independent organisation. We recommend that you always run an up-to-date virus checker on any software before running it. Future Publishing Ltd cannot accept any responsibility for disruption, damage and/or loss to your data or your computer system that may occur while using these discs, the programs or the data on them. Ensure that you have backups of data contained on your hard drives before running any new software.



A convenient chopper with bombs in it.



LAST IS GOOD

Starting off at the back isn't that bad in *Split/Second*. It means you can charge your power bar with some easy drifting, allowing you to plough through the field.



BE DASTARDLY

Jostling for position, you can position yourself behind the leaders, ready to take them out, perhaps by dropping bombs on them or causing buildings to collapse on the track.

DEMOLITION DERBY



WINNER

If you're as good as me, then you can maintain the lead that bit of demolition gave you. A couple of close shaves and the podium is easily achieved, leaving you wanting more.



BP STRIKES

There you go, a perfectly timed accident, a petrol station choosing that precise moment to fall on the roof of the first and second-place cars. Now you're in the lead.

DARKNESS WITHIN: THE DARK LINEAGE

Boy, it sure is dark in here

WEBSITE darknesswithin2.com

THE FIRST GAME in the *Darkness Within* trilogy – *In Pursuit of Loath Nolder* – was a complete pile of bum bums. So it's a pleasure to see that this one looks like it's far better,



Pants scared right off.

approaching the first-person horror angle from the perspective of not turning out to be complete crap.

Not being rubbish seems to be a unique selling point in the modern-day adventure game genre, so this is one that could definitely pique one's interest.

You play as Howard Loreid, the same poor bastard from the first game, who is embarking on another Lovecraftian adventure through time and space. Spooky stuff for horror appreciatives.

SCARY PUZZLES



FRAGMENTS

That time-old bastion of first-person puzzlers, the scraps of paper conundrum.



FROZEN

Perhaps he got fed up trying to piece together the scraps puzzle and topped himself.

HEGEMONY: PHILIP OF MACEDON

Alexander's dad gets his turn

WEBSITE www.longbowgames.com/hegemony

"**TWO CAN PLAY** at this game", said Longbow Games to Creative Assembly. "You can go with your *Shoguns* and your *Medievals*, but we'll stick with the ancient world. How do you like that?" And so they did, producing a *Total War* game in everything but name.

This one follows Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, as he founded the Macedonian empire.

Incidentally, it claims to have satellite-accurate maps of ancient Greece. Anyone else see the problem with that statement, or is it just us?



1. PURPLE

The purple things on the map are cities, armies or places of interest you control.

2. MISSION

A list of critical or optional things for you to be doing, varying from capturing cities to constructing trade routes.

3. MAP

Zoom out and you get a parchment-style view, zoom in and things go all *Total War*.

ANCIENT WORLD



COMBAT

Fighting is a mix of RTS fare and *Total War*'s macro-unit style. Here some peltasts get taken down by Philip.



TRADE

Food is vital, so it's essential to capture farms to help feed your army and your cities. Hungry armies don't fight well.

BEST OF THE REST



A bunch of other stuff you'll find on your disc, if you click hard and fast enough, that is...



SCOURGE OF WAR: GETTYSBURG

scourgeofwar.com

This recreates the most famous battle of the American Civil War. Not that anyone apart from Americans care.



REVENGE OF THE TITANS

puppygames.net/revenge-of-the-titans

It's not cute and cuddly, but it is. Confusing. A tower defence game with LEGO-esque people with Terminator red eyes giving you orders. Unmissable.



IRONCLADS: SCHLESWIG WAR 1864

fotemgames.ru

A game about Danes trying to annex Prussia's duchy of Schleswig by port blockades. Wake up at the back!



SBK X

www.sbkthegame.com/en-us

If you play this demo, throw your ragdoll driver headfirst into a wall of tyres. It's what he'd want you to do.



TENNIS ELBOW 2011 DEMO

bit.ly/tenniselbow2011

Not a video tutorial on how to solve the troublesome arm complaint, but a game which allows you to display your furry ball-whacking abilities to all and sundry. Make like Federer and download it.



RAINBLOOD: TOWN OF DEATH DEMO

bit.ly/rainblooddemo

This isn't really a hot download as such, but the name is so great that it had to be mentioned. It's extremely popular in China, so it must be doing right. Mind you, so are scorpions on sticks.



Freeware

Rick Lane refuses to pay for anything



ON THE
DVD
PCZONE

This month, find the inner funkster of Transylvania's favourite son while he ruins Christmas; try to do a Hornblower as you type until your fingers bleed; make sure a bunch of violent psychopaths are well fed; rescue a bunch of ragdolls from their deaths; and click for monsters.

DRACULA CHA CHA

Dance Baby Twist Them Legs Travolta

DEVELOPER Lobo WEBSITE bit.ly/draculachacha



RICK'S PICK

Choice of BroadSides

About: Choice of BroadSides Blog Share on: @RandomJazz Facebook Twitter

Show More

That far, you've given as good as you've gotten. The battle could go either way. Captain Witherstone is trying to close with Quatermain to force a boarding action.

It will be hard to restrain the battle as a gunnery action—you'll have to either carry the enemy by boarding or try to damage their rigging enough to sink them.

Which will it be?

• I've done enough to be able to break off the battle honorably—that's all I really wanted.

• I would really like to press the battle, but it's too dangerous. I must flee.

• I think I can win this one.

• The only possible end to this battle is Lysa's surrender or destruction.

Next

CHOICE OF BROADSIDES

DEVELOPER Heather Albano, Dan Fabulich and Adam Morse
WEBSITE choiceofgames.com/broadsides

A TEXT-BASED RPG, *Choice of BroadSides* places you in the britches of a young naval officer from the fictional country of Albion, rising up the ranks from inexperienced crew member to the commander of your own ship.

The game progresses through an effective mixture of player choices and assessing how your character's abilities stand up to the various scenarios it presents you with. If you're an experienced sailor, you'll be able to set up complex ambushes, whereas a talented gunner can sail into the middle of a merchant fleet and blast everything out of the water.

In addition, choosing to play as an aristocrat may give you a headstart in your relationship with fellow officers, but a lowly born sailor may have a greater rapport with his crew.

Choice of BroadSides is really enjoyable. It's very well written, with straightforward yet vivid prose that's devoid of any pretentious waffle, and there are a huge amount of ways you can progress in your career.

THIS GAME IS weirder than a *Pipkins* version of *Britain's Got Talent*. You play as the most famous of vampires (or at least, a badly drawn blue man in a suit with pointy ears) as he traverses a Christmas-themed landscape collecting presents and destroying everything else.

The game is played entirely by mashing the space bar, which does a variety of things depending on

the context within which it's pressed.

The standard action is causing Dracula to jump, allowing him to collect airborne festive gifts and a variety of power-ups that will cause him to grow, shrink, speed up or slow down.

If there is an enemy or obstacle in front of our undead hero he performs a karate kick, which is accompanied by the wonderful phrase "Dracula Karate Baby" being shown at the bottom of the screen. There's also a dance off with

a green elf wearing a Santa outfit, and a chance to play a game of rock/paper/scissors with a reindeer.

Frankly, *Dracula Cha Cha* is rubbish. The collision detection is dodgy, and the game doesn't always register that you've hit the space bar – something of an achievement as this is the game's only control. Yet despite all this (or because of it) it's endearingly silly. The grammatically dubious phrases accompanying all your actions are a particularly amusing highlight.

Dracula Cha Cha won't hold your attention, but it's worth a look just so you can share in the strangeness.

"Worth a look just so you can share in the strangeness"



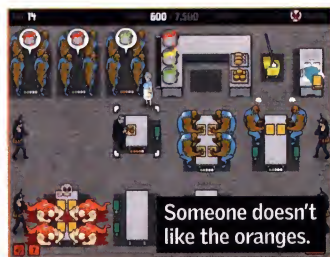
DEATH ROW DINER

Lunch lady Doris, in the dining room, with a ladle

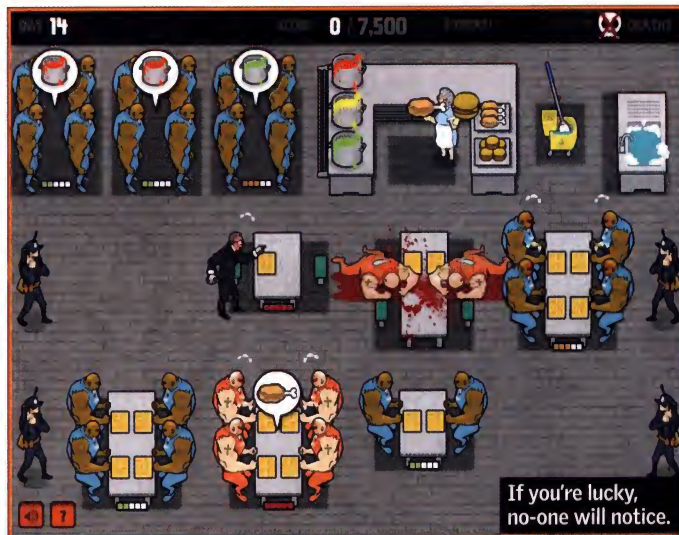
DEVELOPER [adult swim] WEBSITE bit.ly/deathrowdiner

AS THE DINNER lady at a maximum security prison, it's your job to ensure the inmates are kept under control during mealtimes. Precisely why this is the duty of the dinner lady is a mystery, but after playing *Dracula Cha Cha* it makes perfect logical sense by comparison.

Keeping the prison's murderous population under control involves ensuring they're given the right food, sit with members of their own gang, and most importantly, aren't kept waiting. Sluggish service results in a riot, which you must subdue with your ladle. Should a fight go on too long inmates will kill each other. Three fatalities equals game over, leaving you to mop up the bloody remains.



The learning curve is well designed, with more food choices gradually opening up and complicating the proceedings. The latter levels are extremely difficult, a single mistake almost certainly lead to failure. But each level is relatively short, so any frustration is short lived. Frantic fun for all the family (or rather, Family).



GIBBETS 2

Gibbet some more

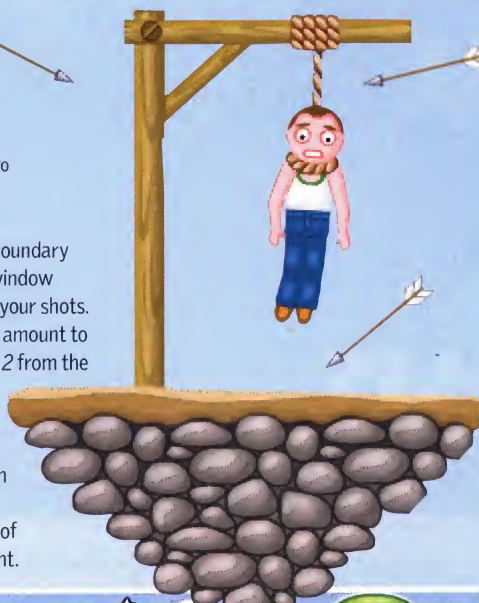
DEVELOPER Konstantin Boronenkov, Mariya Starovoytova & Oleg Stepuro
WEBSITE notdoppler.com/gibbets2.php

THE SEQUEL TO *Gibbets* (notdoppler.com/gibbets.php) builds on the original with more complex challenges and environmental hazards, although it's really more of the same. Using a bow and arrow you must carefully aim to cut the ropes of hanged men before they choke to death, avoiding shooting them in the process.

The gameplay is mostly physics-based, many challenges involving shooting over obstacles, such as a stack of boxes, or carefully setting up a chain-shot to free the necks of multiple victims. One significant change is that you can now invert your controls and pull the bow forwards rather than backwards. This helps to alleviate the frustration

of overshooting the boundary of the game's Flash window area which screw up your shots.

There isn't a huge amount to differentiate *Gibbets 2* from the original, but this isn't necessarily a bad thing. It fixes what was wrong with the first game and provides a sprinkling of novelty in its own right.



WEBGAME OF THE MONTH



MAMONO SWEEPER

DEVELOPER Hojomaka Soft
WEBSITE bit.ly/mamonosweeper

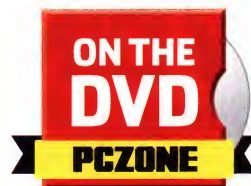
THIS WEBGAME TWISTS classic *Minesweeper* by adding RPG elements. Mines are replaced by monsters, from blue ghosts to nasty green dragons. With limited health points, you have to avoid clicking on high-level monsters and aim for beasts that are the same level as you.

As usual the numbers beneath the tiles help you navigate, yet instead of hinting at the amount of monsters in the area, they correspond to the combined levels of nearby nasties.

Mamono Sweeper is difficult early on, but the RPG elements work well – the added layer of complexity and progression making it considerably more entertaining than vanilla *Minesweeper* clones.

FREEPLAYEXTEND

Extend



David Brown loves a good gun and a threesome



Get out there and shoot some Smurfs

MOD FOR Crysis [WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/avatar1](http://www.moddb.com/mods/avatar1)

PERHAPS ONE OF the most visually stunning mods we've ever seen, modder Lee Barguss (leeswim247) has created a mod that has to be seen by *Crysis* enthusiasts. He's created a work that combines the tense combat of the game with the only good thing about the movie: the world itself. There's just one tiny problem: it runs so badly it's unplayable – even on the office beast machine, which chews up *Crysis* and spits it out derisively.

Any praise directed towards the *Avatar* mod has to be constantly filed under "What might have been" because it's so badly optimised there's no way anyone, bar those owning the most powerful PCs on the planet, can get

a reasonable frame rate out of it. This problem can be solved by putting *Crysis*' visual settings to their lowest notches, but that makes the point of the mod – the visuals – irrelevant. So let's talk about it as if it did work.

"There's no way anyone can get a reasonable frame rate out of it"

Barguss has spent three months piecing it together. Ninety percent of this time was spent on creating the lavish visuals, the likes of which you'll never have seen in a game before. As one succinct poster on the mod's home page notes, "I had to slap myself to believe that this was an actual mod".

High praise indeed, and a comment nobody could disagree with too much. But in essence *Avatar* is just vanilla *Crysis* with a great new look.

But of course, you'll never see things as Barguss intended, because most of

your time will be spent grinding your teeth into stumpy little pegs as you nudge the mouse slightly to the left and watch the whole thing grind to a halt, as everything is redrawn criminally slowly. It seems that Barguss has forgotten the first rule of development: make sure your players can play the game.

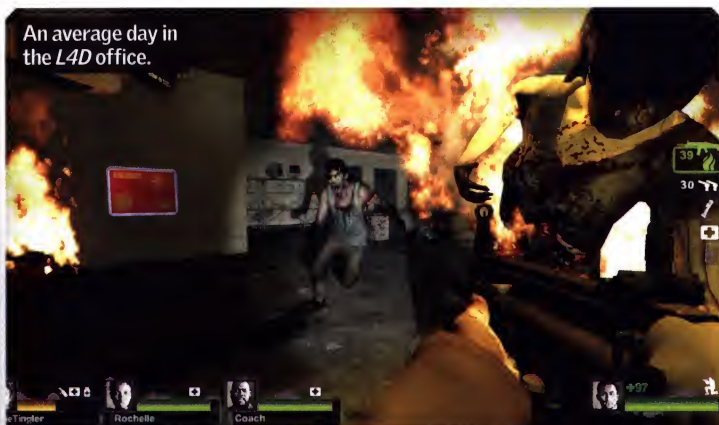
There's pretty much no way you'll be playing *Avatar* properly any time soon. However, there's always the hope it'll get tweaked and optimised to a playable degree. If this does happen this will be in any essential *Crysis* mods list, and the new "look console friends, this is what my machine can do" showing off thing.

You could use it for that now, but consoles will laugh as you freeze in place for the umpteenth time. Barguss, don't let this be the case forever.

Lush.



An average day in the L4D office.



DEAD ECHO 2

Even mods are getting rebooted

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead 2 [WEBSITE bit.ly/deadecho2](http://WEBSITE.bit.ly/deadecho2)

THERE'S A RELATIVE dearth of quality new material being put out for *Left 4 Dead's* sequel, as a lot of people who worked hard to bring campaigns to the first game are recycling their old maps, while adding new tricks they've learned from *L4D2*. So it is with *Dead Echo 2*, a stupidly difficult campaign that's even bold enough to issue the challenge "Expert This!" on its loading screen poster.

Anyone who does manage to complete this campaign on Expert (or Expert Realism for the masochistic) deserves some doffed hats. Even though it does start getting easier after the first level, which begins with

a punishing first encounter, each level is a good length and that in itself increases the difficulty exponentially.

Add to this the careful placement of swarm events and things are rarely less than frantic. It's not stable though, with melee weapons not being what they appear to be when picked up (take a sword and it becomes an axe, for example) and at least one event trigger button not working.

That said, manage to work through these little issues and this is an immensely challenging campaign that could only be improved with some more customised textures and some fine tuning. Recommended.

DECEITS

Return of the sex card

MOD FOR The Witcher [WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/deceits](http://WEBSITE.moddb.com/mods/deceits)

THIS IS A badly translated version of an award-winning Polish *Witcher* mod. Set in the hamlet of Deceits, a settlement which proves to be worthy of its name, Geralt is halted at a broken bridge by a bricklayer who's asking for three grand to fix it, the greedy little bastard.

While exploring the environs around the village and its alehouse, Geralt discovers a murder, which he sets about solving. He also meets a gossipy woman he can seduce, providing sex card fans with a little something. All told there are seven quests to complete, 18 characters to converse with and a scattering of enemies here and there, including a frustrating megaechinops.

Disappointingly, there are virtually no voiceovers. While understandable, it does make the proceedings seem bizarre, as voices are so common in games nowadays. However, being a mod, it is asking a lot.

Issues of translation abound in the text, but this doesn't really matter too much. One of the most unnerving things is how the game hasn't really aged that well, and looks a bit drab and rough around the edges. Still, for *Witcher* fans, this is another hour or so of decent entertainment.



MANDATE OF HEAVEN

Nothing to do with male bonding

MOD FOR Crysis [WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/mandate-of-heaven](http://WEBSITE.moddb.com/mods/mandate-of-heaven)

AS SIMPLE AND straightforward as you could possibly get, *Mandate of Heaven* does everything superbly. It provides an expansive map to explore, chucks loads of combat situations at you, and gives you the equipment to really go to town on the enemy.

Your job as Nomad (with cunning use of voice acting from the original game) is to get behind enemy lines and eliminate a renegade Chinese general and then get out. This mod doesn't offer anything new, but it's a chance to play *Crysis'* sublime combat once again.

While *Avatar* might get the eye candy vote, *Mandate of Heaven* is brilliant fun. Sometimes the best policy is to just keep things simple.



MOD CONS!

The add-ons to avoid



DALLS ALISTAIR

MOD FOR *Dragon Age: Origins*
[WEBSITE bit.ly/dalls_alistair](http://WEBSITE.bit.ly/dalls_alistair)

You know what *Dragon Age: Origins* really needed? Forget bug fixes and texture tweaks, what you really have to install if you want a full experience is a mod that gives Alistair sideburns. Apparently he looks "manlier" because all real men have sideburns. Look around, you'll see this is true.

CRYBUSTERS

Who you going to call? (sorry)

MOD FOR Crysis Wars [WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/crybusters-mission-ii-cryst-and-devil](http://www.moddb.com/mods/crybusters-mission-ii-cryst-and-devil)

RARELY HAS SUCH rage been brought forth in reaction to a mod at Zone Towers. Especially one that looks so interesting on the outside.

Crybusters is an ongoing concern, with the second mission having just been released. The premise is that you are part of the Crybusters team: three people who go around hunting for paranormal activity. For an utterly bizarre and embarrassing reason the entities that you discover are called not ghosts but 'snoeys'.

Sadly, this is just the first of many annoying elements, starting with the text. The translation from the original German is horrible, but this could have been overlooked if the mod itself was any good.

Things didn't start out well for *Crybusters* when we found there wasn't

"Crybusters is one of the most disappointing mods ever seen in these pages"

an Options section in the menu screen, meaning no key reconfiguration, or graphics tweaking, or anything. In fact, enter the main menu and there's no way of getting back into the game short of loading a saved game.

CRYINDUCER

You start off with no real idea what to do or how to do it. A haunted house presents itself to you, but you can't get in, as a big green force bubble stands in your way. Some arrows point to a light in the garden and, after some searching on the internet, you discover you have to shoot all the lights in the garden out. As there's a lot of them this is a very tedious exercise. You could just use a grave to remove the bubble as well, but there's no way of actually knowing this other than random searching.

Once inside the house, everything's ridiculously dark, so you need to increase the gamma level on your monitor (remember, there isn't an options screen) to combat this. Credit has to be doled out for creating an air of foreboding, but the prevalent emotion is frustration from being lost.

Eventually, much aimless scurrying later, you discover a weapon that allows



A snoey. Groan.

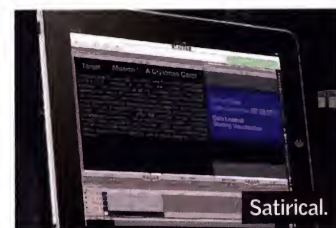
you to fight the snoeys, but the combat is atrocious, the enemies flit past the room you're in and are very difficult to hit without just holding down the fire button and waiting until they take enough damage to die.

Do this, kill some more snoeys in another tedious encounter, and you'll get to Mission II, which has abysmal twee flute music accompanying you. You'll likely give up very soon after this.

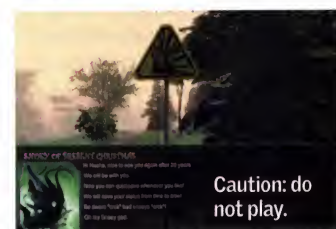
Crybusters is one of the most disappointing mods ever seen in these pages. There are some good ideas in here, and the first mission could have been a really excellent haunted house level, but criminally bad design, horrible pacing and frequent unskippable pieces of bad dialogue has sunk this battleship before it's even got near the enemy fleet. As it stands, this mod is just no fun at all.



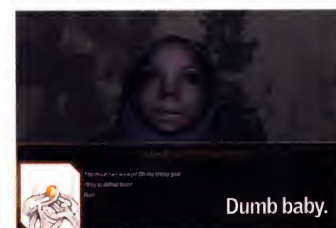
Don't be fooled by this exciting grab.



Satirical.



Caution: do not play.



Dumb baby.

SANCTUM

Where's the tower then?

MOD FOR Unreal Tournament 3 **WEBSITE** udk.com/showcase-sanctum

CREATED USING THE *Unreal Development Kit*, *Sanctum* is a surprisingly difficult first-person tower defence mod.

You've got to build blocks on a bridge to stop the aliens breaking through into your home city. The said blocks can contain Gatling guns, lightning rod things and the like, all upgradeable depending on how many build points you have. You've also got weapons

yourself, which can also be upgraded and will prove vital, because often your defences just can't cope with the swarms of enemies.

Practice is the key in *Sanctum*, as at first you'll be coming up with apparently foolproof plans that'll fail spectacularly. You need to think really carefully about the enemies you're facing and exactly how to utilise your relatively tiny pool of build points.



One point of criticism is the over-reliance on your own weapons to defeat the enemy, but this could also have just been a matter of a lack of forward planning and actual skill. *Sanctum* doesn't have that much charm either,

what with the clean futuristic look and robotic feel. Still, well worth a go for tower defence fanatics wanting a (literal) change of perspective. With a little more fleshing out in the full release, this could be a sleeper hit.

METRO LAUNCHER

Making 2D is the daddy

MOD FOR Metro 2033 **WEBSITE** moddb.com/mods/metro-2033-launcher

LITTLE THINGS MIGHT not always be what people want, but it's what you do with them that makes the difference. While this mod is but a mere little box of tricks, the things it allows you to do couldn't be more vital for the game in question, for this is one game that needs some serious graphical tweaking before you run it.

"Why?" you might well ask. One of the major reasons is the way it deals with 3D devices. This game draws two images at the same time

then does something weird with them to get them all pop-out-at-youish. The problem *Metro* has is that even when you're not playing it in 3D the game thinks you are, so it draws both images. This means your frame rate gets crippled because your PC is doing far more work than it should.

This little launcher allows you to address this issue and more, giving you easy access to all the options the in-game menus tantalise you with, but never actually let you change. Instead of diving around in .ini and .txt files, you

can do it all from a *Windows* interface, including forcing V-sync on (which solves the 3D problem) plus giving you access to FOV, tessellation, and depth of field settings and so on.

Tweak properly and your *Metro* could look like this.



Technically, this isn't really a mod, given that everything it enables you to do is already there if you were to get your hands dirty, but it's still an absolute must for *Metro* players.

MORE OPTIONS AT THE PEARL

Threesomes, foursomes and moresomes

MOD FOR Dragon Age: Origins **WEBSITE** bit.ly/morepearloptions

THERE ARE SOME right perverts out there, everybody knows that. Even the most cursory glance on the internet will reveal an immense world of utter perversion, with any possible niche, nook and cranny having websites devoted to it.

So why, then, are people forcing this into otherwise sensible computer games? Why spend hours making digital recreations of the carnal act in *Dragon Age* when two minutes could have you in possession of plenty of videos of the real thing?

For those of you with such a mind, who want to see Morrigan and Leilana

romping with the main character in a woodland area, this gives you plenty of food for thought. And it makes it as simple as you'd imagine: just go along to the Pearl in Denerim (that posh brothel where you do a bit of killing) and have a chat to Amber, who'll then be

Sometimes being left out is fun.



able to fill you in with the details of more phallic festivities.

The mod's creator has given you suggested combinations of characters in the dialogue options, but he also says "Feel free to experiment with other Warden gender/race combinations."

If this has piqued your interest, you should browse dragonagenexus.com for other nude-y sex mods, because there are loads of them. You sick bastards that you are.

Just be aware that you'll need to have a Nexus account to access adult content. Then you can masturbate to your heart's content.

The *Fresh Prince* went to hell when Will Smith left.

PART ONE

MAP MAKING— LEFT 4 DEAD 2

Nick Brakespear hammers out the basics

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead 2 [WEBSITE l4d.com](http://www.l4d.com)

IN THE BEGINNING, Valve created the Source Engine. And the level was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of Gabe Newell moved upon the face of the *Hammer World Editor*. And Gabe said, "Let there be zombies", and there were zombies.

To most gamers, this rendition of the birth of a level may as well be true. While in a broad sense we appreciate the complexity of even the simplest game, most of us can't conceive of the work required to turn the gibberish that is game code into a tangible place where Infected roam.

"It's a toilet," we reason, "of course it flushes. What else would it do?" And then we criticize the toilet for not having real-time physics, and that its scripted

nature somehow diminishes its complexity and value. But when the proverbial toilet stops flushing, do we have any idea how to fix it? Or do we simply stand there, staring at our un-flushable bog, trying to remember where we put the emergency bucket?

LEFT 4 GENESIS

Certain that I could show how easy it is to create a paradise where survivors and zombies might come together in violent union, I loaded up *Hammer*, the Source Engine's level editor.

A level begins empty: blackness mapped only by a grid. World geometry is built with three-dimensional blocks called brushes. These must form the foundations of the level.

Such is the metaphysical nature of the Source Engine that the contents of

a level must be shielded from the void, lest they be tainted by nonexistence that can 'leak' into it, preventing the level from being compiled and subsequently played.

I set about constructing a small box-shaped room with orange walls. And then I begin to swear and squint at the monitor like it's my front door at 3am and I'm too drunk to get the key in. The victory of my orange box has been



The almighty blue square of the Finale.

followed by a disastrous attempt to add an orange corridor.

"Entity weapon_spawn leaked!" *Hammer* tells me as I attempt to compile the level. One of my corridor's walls isn't reaching the floor, and so a small gap now leads to the blackness. I don't notice this for 10 minutes.

The frustration caused by inflexible software and user fallibility settles into a pattern of expletives and subsequent revelations that's repeated many times. But using *Hammer* becomes addictive as with every problem solved, a smug sense of triumph overwhelms adversity: I'm clever, because I fixed a problem presented to me by my own ignorance.

As the necessity of building every single wall by virtual hands truly sinks in, my grand plans for spaceships, pirate

DIY What you'll need...

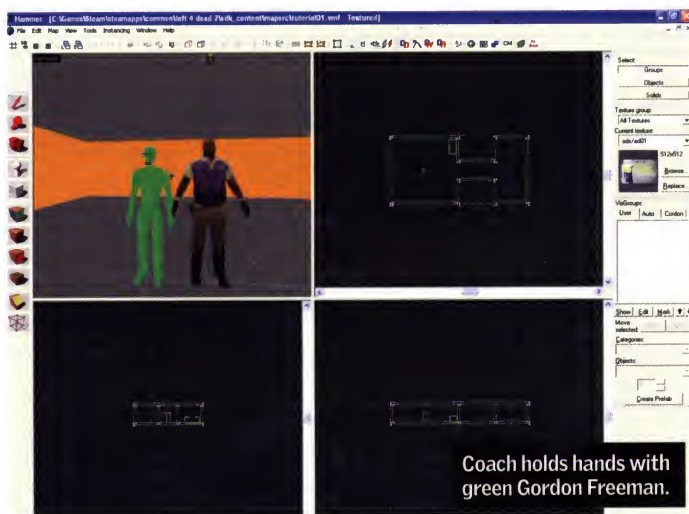
- A Valve Source engine game (*Portal*, *Half-Life 2*, *Left 4 Dead 2*, etc)
- The relevant SDK (downloadable from *Steam's* Tools section)
- The ability to read, as developer. valvesoftware.com/wiki has a variety of tutorials and tool explanations.
- Time. Making a good level takes weeks. Making a Valve-quality level will take months.

THE INVISIBLE WORLD

This is what a level really looks like



Much like the real world, a *L4D2* player sees but a glimpse of what's really going on around them. When seen through the developer's eyes, a finished level is a confusing colour-coded mass of box-shaped proximity triggers, funny little floating icons, AI path-finding information, and invisible "clipping" walls used to control player exploration. So you see, omniscience can be a confusing thing.



Coach holds hands with green Gordon Freeman.

ships and floating cities are worn away to reveal more realistic aspirations. Everything must be placed. Creating a light requires not only an entity to provide the light, but also a prop to serve as the source of the light.

Contrary to our expectations, light bulbs don't emit light, nor do fires emit the sound of burning wood without a sound entity to accompany them. The virtual worlds we run around are born of completely independent components whose connections must be configured and defined, and controlled by such a fine web of logic relays, inputs and

outputs, that as I stare at my sad little orange box I feel rather deflated.

DARK IS GOOD

Darkness is my friend, I reason, as I move through tutorials and create a ladder, a platform, some stairs. The darker the level, the more detail I can imply with the bare minimum of it. From this idea of cheap level design evolves a nobler concept: to use darkness as an artistic opportunity, and a chance for players to accidentally shoot each other.

Having completed my basic training, I manage to construct two box-based

"My grand plans for spaceships and floating cities are worn away"



My orange box brings all the zombies to the yard.



A mysterious light distracts the team.

orange-walled prototype levels, connected by a simple safe room transition. In spite of the adaptive, intelligent and vindictive nature of the AI Director, the levels cannot be populated with zombies or explored by the Survivor bots until a Nav Mesh has been created. This means generating an ultimately invisible, colour-coded map that sits upon any walkable surface the Infected are expected to navigate.

Zones must be marked for the start and end of a level, and the Director's zombie-spawning antics must be controlled by other such markers, lest the level simply lack the correct flow. As dynamic as the AI Director may be, like everything else it relies upon an inflexible system that can frustrate as much as any other.

As dawn approaches, I've started working beyond the confines of my tutorial-based boxes. I've made a multitude of prototypes; of angular temples and darkened roads, of street lamps and forests. They're all a bit rubbish and most of these ideas will perish before the end, but each one represents the learning of a new technique or solution, and brings me closer to figuring out what the hell I'm actually going to make in the long run.

Next Month: Castles, curves, choppers and tanks. **PCZ**

TIPS 'N' TRICKS

Making your first level

STAY SQUARE

Due to the nature of the engine, rectangular environments perform better and compile faster. That's not to say that levels should only be of right angles, but their foundations should.

TIDY UP

Adding props like trees should be the last thing you do before the Nav Mesh. They're large, and their wireframe can really clutter up your view of the level if you're designing structures. Keeping a tidy, neatly designed map can save a lot of time and eyestrain.

PACE YOURSELF

Being overambitious can lead to a lot of disappointment and confusion. Keep it simple until you've shot your first zombie. Once you know it works, you can experiment more.

SCRIBBLE

Hammer is a resource hog. Keep some paper and pencil nearby at all times; you never know when you'll need to jot something down, only to find that your PC has staggered to a halt and is refusing to load *Notepad*.



Online Zone

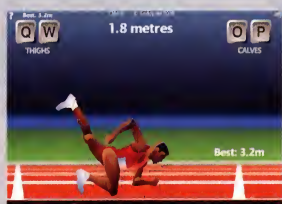
What's new in *PC ZONE*'s forum and Fight Club

Come and take on the Zone Staff in our monthly online gaming free-for-all!

We're *Bad Company* and you're *Bad Company* too, so we got together and made sweet, sweet love, in a brains splattered all over the floor way. If we weren't getting our heads shot off, we were talking about chicken molesting and the life and (surprising) love of Charlie Brooker (no connection). After all that, there was just time for a little chat.

tw@tter

Tweeting like a bird



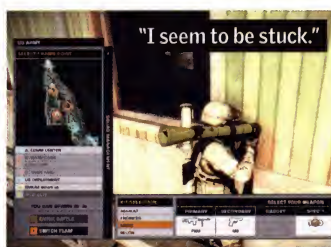
THE TIME-WRECKER IS back. After more than a year without it, *QWOP* (foddy.net/athletics.html) came back into our lives and almost destroyed this issue. After learning the crab walk cheat still worked, attempts to play properly elicited a miserable 16.6 metres before the end was called.

The other main cause for lost work hours in the office was sexual intercourse with fowl. No, not that we actually did it, just the logistics of human-chicken entanglement. How would it occur? What orifice what be used? Do so many people in Iowa really indulge in the practice? The debate was only quashed when somebody discovered a *Winners vs Losers* – a two-player version of *QWOP*(ish) which involves tripping over hurdles. Go here if you want to try it out: www.foddy.net/WinnersvsLoser.html

Elsewhere, we asked what you thought of the vuvuzelas, the trumpet South African fans were blowing at the World Cup. In fact, we also asked about the tournament as a whole. It's interesting writing this as the competition is mid-way through. Did England win? Did they go out on penalties? Which player is now having to wear a paper bag on his head after making a howling error? Only @pczone can you find the answers.

FIGHT CLUB

A case of mistaken identity



THIS MONTH IT should have been Rush, but someone stupidly changed it to Conquest just before our *Battlefield: Bad Company 2* Fight Club kicked off. D'oh. Never mind, at least it meant we were familiar with the surroundings, though it didn't help much, as once again violent, hideous death was wrought on all those related to the magazine.

Having said that, it wasn't as bad the first time we bared our bottoms at the enemy and dared you all to add more holes to them with bullets. In fact, as Steve managed to get almost to the top of the leaderboard (on the losing team, naturally) it wasn't an entirely disastrous campaign.

First up then was the familiar scarred harbour of Panama Canal, with the *ZONE* lads ending up on the same team. Fight Club regular and former work experience slave EGTF was on hand to provide David with some tips on how not to die horribly within seconds of spawning, and seven kills in the first



"Thankfully for Team Zone things were over quickly and the action moved on"

few minutes were surely a sign of greater things to come. It wasn't to be, as Russian Bear single-handedly took it upon himself to eliminate him every time his back was turned. Steve fared a bit better, though his ascendancy to third place in the score table for his side was mainly due to following good players while they captured flags.

Fight Club regular and, at the time, current work experience slave JoWoo decided to be a sniper, picking off David at least once, before a group of angered readers began to fire rockets into the room he was hiding in, turning his camouflaged body into a red, sticky paste.

This battle was one-sided and the non-*Zone* team won easily, despite some spirited defence

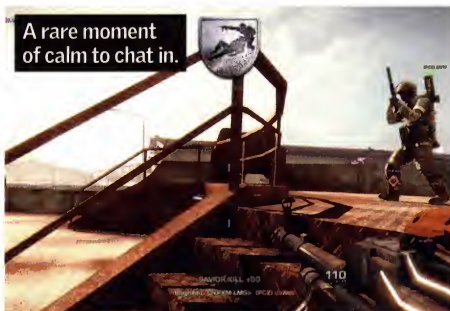
around Flag D. Thankfully for Team Zone things were over quickly and the action moved on to Laguna Alta.

DAMN THE RUSKIES

The fighting got intense quickly, tanks blocking the main roads and battling each other as infantry swarmed like flies through the buildings surrounding them. David decided to avoid this battle zone, moving up to Flag C and helping his losing team capture the flag.

An almighty struggle for possession of this isolated flag began, with rockets, tank shells and many, many rounds being expended before the Russians finally succeeded in re-capturing it.

Again, things were all over quickly, and the team bugged off to watch Italy vs Paraguay, without even a "so long, suckers!" parting shot at the victorious readers. Next time, it'll definitely be Rush, we promise.



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

Charlie Brooker and Konnie Huq's betrothal – PC ZONE goes all Hello

ALBERTHAMMOND: It'll last until, in his own inimitable style, Brooker lets slip that he thinks she has rose petals like a nine volt battery.

LIQUID_METAL: She's been on *Screenwipe* a few times, he's a funny chap and she's a nice looking lady.

BYRNE453: The fact that he's managed to punch so far above his weight gives the rest of us hope. We, the embittered Nerds of the world, salute you, Mr Brooker. Let us know what doing the sex on ladies is like.

DR_DARK: Not sure what you're on about, my wife's hot.

SUNSCRAMBLE: He clearly hasn't diddled her in the lady-goal yet. I mean, a gamer and a *Blue Peter* presenter... If two such two such traditionally über-celibate specimens did ever happen to mate, the resulting shock waves could

rip a hole in the fabric of space/time and Dimension X. The whole planet would feel it.

DR_DARK: He's gone all quiet on Twitter like he's embarrassed or something. He's a bit 'ole softy after all.

MADAMEYE: Let's hope he does the decent thing and accidentally-on-purpose releases a sex video from their honeymoon.

SHAKERMAKER07: I mean I regard Konnie Huq as a secret fantasy as much as the next man, but come on, who wants to see Charlie Brooker's "paedophilic walrus" bottom going up and down, up and down, up and down...

MADAMEYE: I reckon Brooker could, indeed, pull it off.

ALBERTHAMMOND: That's Konnie's job now.



CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club – perhaps you've been in South Africa blowing on your vuvuzela – please feel free to join other PCZ readers on the following public servers.

WHO'S WHO

Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant
David Brown [PCZ]plughead
Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudaea
Jon Blyth [PCZ]log
Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx

BATTLEFIELD 2

85.236.100.48:16567

COD 4: MODERN WARFARE

85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE

85.236.100.48:27315

HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH

85.236.100.48:27215

TEAM FORTRESS 2

85.236.100.48:27115

BAD COMPANY 2

Look for "PC ZONE" in the server browser.

SERVERS PROVIDED BY...



MULTIPLAY

ZONE CHAT

Homoerotic Confessions



HATS OFF TO one Zone Chat regular for admitting to enjoying gay porn. It takes a big man to confess to something like that, even in today's liberal, accepting culture.

A roar of laughter erupted around the office when he also admitted: "I didn't realise until half way through... the girls never arrived." Mad Arse In A Shed entered the room after these stark revelations, trying to tempt the chatters away from discussing pictures of toilets posted on Twitter, but Log was having none of it, boldly declaring he'd just watched a chimp having sex with a frog, although he didn't notice there was a child crying in the background, something EGTF had to point out. It's a mad, mad world, gentlemen and ladies, especially when Log's around.

Jonny_p66 tried to get a rise out of people by claiming he was wearing women's underwear, but he was rightly ignored by all. Zone Chat regular Flatline discovered there

were burgers in his kitchen, while simultaneously being called a vagrant and standing accused of just shouting the word 'genitals' in public places. Steve then kicked him out of the chat room for no reason. Things drew to a close when people started talking about Clive Owen, which is as good a time to leave a debate as you could possibly hope to find.



HOW TO JOIN IN!

To be a part of next month's ZONE Chat, join our Steam Community group: PC ZONE (PCZ). If you don't have Steam, first be ashamed of yourself, and then download it from steampowered.com. Keep an eye out for announcements in that there Steam group for the date of the next chat event...

Retrozone

Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback

BLOOD

LOOKING BACK AT a game that you loved as a less decayed and pessimistic human, and for it to stand up to your newly sad eyes is always a pleasure. *Blood* just about pulls this off.

That's because it appeals not to the pipe-smoking appreciator of games, but more to the gentleman who enjoys the ripping apart of shit and tearing it up. And while we may now be intolerant of difficulty, and games that expect us to get better at them through sheer hard work and muscle memory, games that end a session of scalable sprite carnage with a man singing "I did it... my... way..." will never stop being brilliant.

You'll probably remember the action here: it's a classic old-school 3D FPS – hold alt for strafe, collect keys, and find secret areas – but do you remember the

story? You'd be forgiven for missing it. Instead of unfolding through a series of elegant cutscenes and audio logs, it was tucked away in a readme.txt file.

WHO NEEDS STORY?

You play Caleb, a gunfighter and leader of the Cabal, a cult worshipping the god Tchernobog. But you and your fellows were betrayed and murdered by the said evil diety. Why, you don't know. How you were revived is also a mystery. All you know is that you've got a real urge to kill everything in the game that's capable of movement. Look, if you want a plot, go play *Ultima*.

Blood has are plenty of pop references which have ripened with age: *Army of Darkness*, *Jaws*, *Nightmare on Elm Street* and *Friday the 13th* all get little homages, making *Blood* feel even more like a valid part of our past.

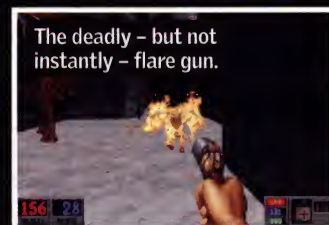
This is one of the few retro games you'll play that brings back the feeling you had when you first played it: a ridiculous sense of bloodthirsty optimism about games, and the feeling that people had as much fun making it as you'll get playing it. So why aren't you playing it?



There's always a fat guy.



AI lapse looks like pissing demon.



The deadly – but not instantly – flare gun.



Hello. Didn't see you there.

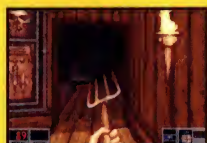
But how? A simpleton's guide

We tried looking up "Blood" in a few online stores, but loads of vampire stuff came up. Stupid vampires. The idea that "love never dies" is offensively absurd in the first place, but to romanticise Dracula, you'd have to be the kind of tool who writes letters to serial killers because you think they're imaginative in bed. Werewolves

are cool though, but only when they're being monsters, not some metaphor for the hidden destructive nature of man.

Anyway, you can buy *Blood* from Good Old Games (gog.com) for \$6, which translates into a tidy wee sum a little over £4. So go on: fill your boots. Fill your boots with *Blood*.

First blood The stuff you use to draw blood in Blood



1 PITCHFORK
Your melee weapon – pointier than a fist, but no more damaging. Bit silly using it really.



2 TOMMY GUN
One of the weapons that dates *Blood*'s setting to the '20s, when Tommy guns were in fashion.



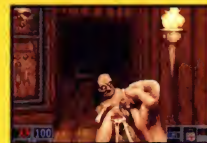
3 FLARE GUN
Maybe the thinking was a flamethrower would encourage children to burn things, but this wouldn't.



4 TNT
Watch out for chains of explosions – it's easy to kill yourself. Unlike today's games, death is a possibility.



5 AEROSOL CAN
Hang on, when did they invent spray-on deodorant, then? "1927" you say Wikipedia? OK then.



6 VODOO DOLL
One of the dafter weapons. It's a gun with invisible bullets, really. How very unrealistic.

Now & Then

CIVILIZATION V vs PANZER GENERALS



Hexagon...

ONE OF THE innovations in *Civilization V* owes itself to *Panzer Generals*. Jon Shafer – a former *Civ 2* modder, now *Civ 5*'s lead designer – is the guy behind the move to hexagons and one-unit-per-tile, and he makes no secret of where he got the idea.

Although *Civ 5* will have the Firaxis hallmarks – Gandhi, Alpha Centauri, Settlers and all the things that make *Civ Civ*, it'll also have the new system of troop movement – no stacking, so combat units need to be positioned according to new (to *Civ*) strategies. Will it work? Probably, this being Sid.

Panzer Generals is fairly intense, but fairly accessible, wartime strategy game. Whether or not you know what the word "groggnard" means, the transparent approach to the battle map takes away a lot of the stress that you might be missing something.



...and on.

Play it! Four steps to ride around in a big tank

- 1** *Panzer Division* is available from Good Old Games (gog.com). As it's a DRM-free file you can put it anywhere. They trust you, so don't disappoint everyone by being a grubby teef.
- 2** The other benefit of gog.com is the effort they put into ensuring the game works. And if I mention one more benefit of gog.com, you're entitled to suggest that we get a room and fuck.
- 3** There can be some drawbacks. Sometimes, when you're using GOG's installer, you have to run it as an administrator. Every love affair has moments like this though. It's fine.
- 4** Once it's installed, you can play it for 10 minutes, before alt-tabbing to GOG's website and wiping your chest and bum against the monitor, saying "ooh, yeah" or "hommina hommina".

MAMEframe

BERZERK

THIS IS ONE of the all-time classics. If you've seen *King of Kong*, the film about videogame obsessives, then you'll have seen the guy who mapped out every possible layout of the rooms in this game. It may have been pointless, but you don't get to be the best in the world by doing things logically or in moderation.

Berzerk is best remembered by regular people for Evil Otto, a smiling, bouncy assassin who took the role of the Immortal Hurry-Up Monster. He cheerfully absorbed your bullets, and gleefully accelerated from the pace of a sedate and breezy beach ball to the furious hysterical blur of a wasp's drum solo as you raced for the exit.

Berzerk is also one of the first games to have speech synthesis – with a 30-word vocabulary that includes

WHAT IS MAME?

The Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of MameUI, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal. So don't.

phrases like "The intruder must not escape" and the alluring "Coins detected in pocket" when it wasn't being played. This much voice synthesis wasn't cheap, and is all the more amazing given that the ROM download is 12k. They knew how to squeeze stuff into a game, back then.



Run away from the Ecstasy pill.



Save RAM by skipping heads.

Time Trump

THE WORST OF... ISSUE 125 – MARCH 2005

MARCH 2005: IT'S not so long ago, but in terms of video games, five years is like well, five years. Let's be sensible about this, videogames may change more quickly than the Eiffel Tower and irrigation technology, but that doesn't alter the flow of time. Anyway, what was shit this month?

THE SETTLERS: HERITAGE OF KINGS SCORED: 65%

"It's far from awful. It's just mind-numbingly dull. Which is worse." – Paul Presley

MIAMI VICE SCORED: 13%

"We can claim to have seen some breathtaking works of importance. *Miami Vice* is not one of them." – Paul Presley

ALEXANDER: THE HEROES HOUR SCORED: 12%

"The soundtrack is a bizarre fusion one can only describe as Mediterranean Folk Disco. Avoid." – Richie Shoemaker

SENTINEL: DESCENDANTS IN TIME SCORED: 47%

"Will only appeal to smug beard wearers with too much time on their hands." – Anthony Holden

COPS 2170: THE POWER OF LAW SCORED: 53%

"One of the most unwelcoming games... it assumes you've played *X-COM* from birth." – Anthony Holden

Sonny adored zipper-less pants.



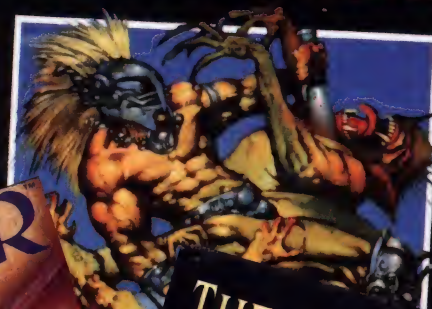
XENON 2

MEGABLAST



GODS

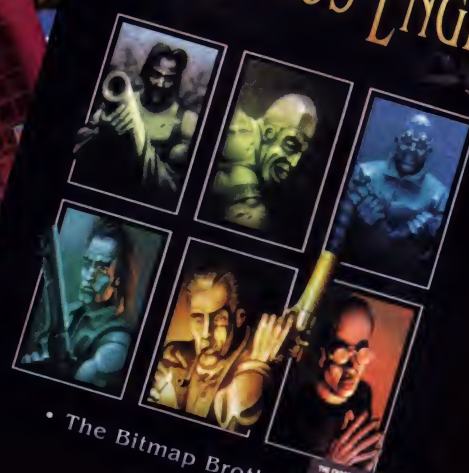
THE BITMAP BROTHERS



Cadaver



THE CHAOS ENGINE



Back In The Day

BITMAP BROTHERS

Jon 'Log' Blyth takes a peak into the legendary pixel siblings' past

THE BITMAP BROTHERS have slipped off everyone's radar this last decade. *Speedball 2* suffered an almost inevitably disappointing re-launch by Frogster, and Tower Studios – where business-brothers Mike Montgomery and John Philips are supposedly at, with fellow



'80s legend Jon Hare – has a stagnant website that looks like it was exported from *Word 6*.

But this is *Retro Zone* – it's not about now; it's about spending a day playing historical games and wondering why, after being spoon-fed tutorials, infinite continues and 10-second checkpoints, do they seem so damn hard.

Few developers stand out today to the same degree as the Bitmap Brothers did. Mike Montgomery and John Philips made more games spanning more genres than we can talk about on these pages, and while their work was a mix of excellence (*Speedball* and *Xenon*) and the confusing (*Cadaver*), you had to

respect their inability to stick to one genre. If they were at Nintendo, Mario would be in a WWII RTS by now.

Let's have a quick peek at a few of the games they made.

XENON II

The success of *Xenon* emboldened the boys at Bitmap Brothers, and the sequel broke all the predefined boundaries of cool. Incorporating a song from Bomb The Bass, which in turn sampled the theme from *Assault on Precinct 13*.

"Gods was typical of the Bitmaps' genre-hopping"

Bitmaps are virtually synonymous with power-ups, and their love of a certain horse ran through many of their games. Nashwan was the password for level two of *Gods*, Super Nashwan were a team in *Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe*, and Super Nashwan Power was a vulgar yet brief display of strength in *Xenon II*.

Spend your hard-earned credits on Super Nashwan Power, and you'll be blessed with a ship that's more powerful than it could ever become through

The Bitmap Brother's games are all classics.



accumulated upgrades. The drawback? It lasts 10 seconds, and starts the moment you leave the shop. You can't even save it for the boss battles. It was basically an elaborate way of saying, "Look what you can never have". Damn those cool bastards.

CADAVER

After the violent mayhem of *Speedball* and *Xenon*, *Cadaver* was an extreme change of pace. Taking the top-down isometric view, *Cadaver* was an isometric adventure puzzler.

You played Karadoc, a thick-set gentlemen who looked like a Toyota had been put into a compactor with a family of bulldogs still inside. You start off, with (understandably) no understanding of your situation, in a room with a boat, a coin, a key, and a diary. Pretty soon, you're walking around, picking stuff up, screaming at tiny spiders, and trying to

work out what the hell it is you're supposed to be doing.

Cadaver is a more thoughtful game, which involves reading short diaries for clues, decoding locks, and exploring your surroundings. It's also a genuine pain working out the game's controls, as the manuals don't say how to activate the icons (so try tapping 1 on the numeric pad).

GODS

Sometimes, it's difficult to rake through your memories and think of a game worth dragging back into the public eye. Other times, your editor walks in half an hour late and says that he had a dream about *Gods*, and tells you to write about it. So, here we are.

Gods was typical of the Bitmaps' genre-hopping. They'd release a game that'd immediately become a poster boy for the genre and a financial hit, then

"The Bitmaps got co-op AI right over two decades ago"

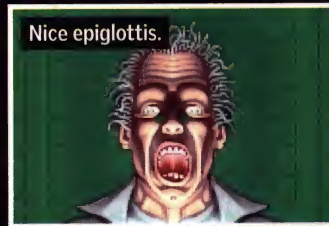
immediately set about mastering a different kind of game. Having proved their mastery of sports (*Speedball 2*), shoot-'em-ups (*Xenon II*), and isometric puzzlers (*Cadaver*), *Gods* was a more traditional 2D combat platformer.

Popular at the time, *Gods* suffers from classic platform furriness. You have a flask of health, which has always been a developer's way of apologising for making the bullets impossible to avoid. Also, enemies appear from nowhere, making it a game as much about pattern memory skills developed playing *R-Type* clones, as much it was about quick reactions.

But the Bitmaps knew their audience, and they know that people loved collecting money and spending it on power-ups. So *Gods* let you discover, buy and hurl a large range of weapons and secondary fireballs – you can even buy a little pet. Shame that buying weapons in the shop was often overridden by the difficult to avoid pick-ups in the world.

Gods never really compared to the pixel-crisp experience that Mario and his chums provided, but in the pantheon

Nice epiglottis.



of woolly '80s platformers (I'm looking at you, *Psygnosis*), *Gods* stood out a couple of inches above the competition.

THE CHAOS ENGINE

The Chaos Engine (*Chaos Engine* to its friends) is a top-down shooter that resembles a Steampunk *Ikari Warriors*, in that you play with a mate.

Where it differs, apart from the inability to fire independently of the way you're moving, is that single players will be blessed with an AI friend, who is a perfect gentlemen, helping out, leaving food if you need it more than he does, and sharing treasure with you. See, publishers? The Bitmaps got co-op AI right over two decades ago. So why can't you?

Chaos Engine looks as dated as any game from the early '90s, but there's plenty of depth to the six classes of character, and if you share your keyboard with a friend, and you'll manage to milk a generous squirt of fun out of the megabyte-large download.

That's if people go around each others houses to play games any more. I wouldn't know, I've been an unsociable loner since I realised that people are all a little bit shit. **PCZ**

But how? Bring back the bros!

All these games are available as abandonware. Just Google the name of the game and the word 'abandonware', and you'll be there. It's legally dodgy, but that's your lookout. If they catch us, we'll say it was part of a searing bit of journalism, or something like that.

On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing and why we're playing them



WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II

Burning heretics: **Nick Brakespear**

AS AN AVID and, at times, deranged fan of the original, I approached *Dawn of War II* with hesitation. And by hesitation, I mean I arched my back and hissed at it as soon as I learned that it was to be something other than that which I was accustomed to. Change scares me. That being said, I'm a complete sucker for *Steam*'s recent splurge of weekend and mid-week sales, so my boycott hasn't lasted.

And I'm somewhat glad that it didn't. I say somewhat, as my experience with the game has settled into an odd Marmite-y mix of love and hate. I love the RPG-style character development – it's a testosterone-driven version of a makeover: "Avitus, trust me, you'll look absolutely fabulous with that new Heavy Bolter. And this cloak? This cloak is so you, Cyrus." I swear I spend more time staring at my deadly (and stylish) arsenal than I do battling xeno scum. It also reminds me of *Chaos Gate*'s squad customisation, which fills me with warm fuzzy waves of nostalgia.

But then there's the hate. While it's customary to hurl abuse at your virtual minions in strategy games (generally due to your own tactical inadequacies and inability to accept them), never before have I seen the



Emperor's Finest exhibiting such utterly painful levels of stupidity. A grenade lands at their feet, and they do nothing. I'm the commander, not their nanny; do I really have to tell them that explosives are bad?

Meanwhile, movement orders are interpreted liberally, and my happy little Space Marines will often decide to take cover on the wrong side of a wall and so present their metal buttocks to the enemy with great aplomb. And then there's the lack of mid-mission saves, rendering the greatest penalty for mission failure: the knowledge that you'll have to do it again.

Usually such frustrations might tempt me to cast the game aside, but I've just acquired a Dreadnought, and he looks lovely in his new golden armour.

VERDICT: (War)hammer time

Oh, suits you sir!

That's not in the Highway Code.

One Acme Anvil later, and his race was over.



SPLIT/SECOND: VELOCITY

Road Warrior: **David Brown**

THE THING ABOUT *Split/Second* is that, never mind how good it is, very few PC gamers will play it.

For a start, it's a total rip-off. At the time of writing, it's priced at £39.95

and that's for a digital download version. You can't buy it in the shops, or anywhere online other than direct2drive.co.uk. These are such a bizarre decisions that it'll be

surprising if even one person was tempted to purchase it. And it's not as if this game was a high-profile title that could afford to play hardball with the sales market, so by restricting where you can get it and pricing it higher than some games' special editions, Disney have effectively buried the game. And it's safe to assume any lack of sales will be blamed on piracy.

This is a shame, because *Split/Second* is good fun, if a tad easy. It's too tempting to stick just a little behind the leaders until the final lap before dropping a plane on them and getting far enough ahead so that they can't reciprocate.

At the end of the day this is pretty much irrelevant, because until Disney brings down *Split/Second's* price and release it to a wider audience than just those aware of D2D, people will never see it.

VERDICT: Overpriced

THE ELDER SCROLLS: OBLIVION

Teething troubles: **Rick Lane**

AFTER PLAYING THROUGH the ghastly tutorial of *Oblivion* four times I've finally managed to create a character that works, in that all of my primary skills are used enough that they all improve at a similar rate.

This fact, alongside long-exhausted complaints of enemies that level up simultaneously to you, the weak story, and the giant vaginas that constantly

inhibit your exploration, are all reasons why *Morrowind* is superior to *Oblivion*.

So when I ask myself why I've replayed *Oblivion* four times, and never replayed *Morrowind* I've, unsurprisingly, found myself unable to answer. But I believe that I've finally worked it out: It's down to my stubbornness.

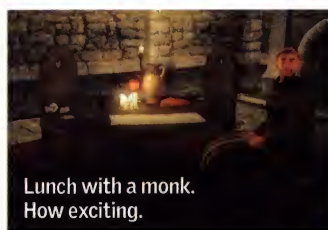
When I first played *Morrowind*, it was the best gaming experience of

my life. With *Oblivion* my enjoyment of the game is hampered by problems, and consequently I've become determined that one day I'll experience a play-through of *Oblivion* as blissful as my time on the island of Vvardenfell.

I simply refuse to accept that *Oblivion* is an inferior game, and so I'm condemned to forever wander the absurdly grassy landscape of Cyrodiil, searching for the *Morrowind*-killer that, deep down, I know I'll never find.

VERDICT: Fun... one day

Any second now he'll start skipping.



Lunch with a monk.
How exciting.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?

Readers on their chosen poison

CRYSIS

Just downloaded the *Living Legends* mod. It just gets better and better. Play it or else.

Daftvader

MACHINARIUM

I got the special edition from Play.com. A lot of imagination and care went into this game. It's a wonderful world they've created.

Cho-Konnit

TEAM FORTRESS 2

After getting bored of waiting for *Left 4 Dead* friends to come online I found myself playing this again. Absolute blast of a game still after all this time.

king_clueless





STEVE HILL'S

NEVERQUEST

Steve Hill is a gibbering Gibberling in *Allods Online*...

I HAVE ASSUMED many varied forms over the course of these pithy adventures in the online netherworld, but until now I have never been a short-arsed blue-faced bear. Step forward NeverQuest the Gibberling, a tiny furry creature that could easily be mistaken for an Ewok in leather trousers.

I may be short, but I am not alone, flanked by a pair of fellow Gibberlings that I hilariously name Itchy and Scratchy. Having three simultaneous characters is a novelty, and with practice I manage to make them hop, skip and jump in perfect synchronicity.

There is no time to mince about however, as we have been summoned to an Audience with the Great Mage. He seems important, and an array of freaks has gathered to hear his address. I meanwhile am pissing about with the screen grabber and only catch the odd snippet about freedom, democracy and demonic threats.

BEARS FOR THE WIN

By the time I give him my full attention, the entire audience is laying prostrate at my feet, seemingly the victims of some *FlashForward*-style blackout. Having survived whatever catastrophe befell them, my furry companions and I are improbably obliged to save the world. Or at the very least Allod, which appears to be some kind of floating island.

With an almost in-joke inevitability, this naturally involves killing some rats, all three of whom feel the wrath of my Novice's Club. My furry fellows join in on bow and arrow duty, and together we form some kind of three-headed cuddly war beast, vanquishing all in our path: lab rats, summoned zombie minions, the lot.

In the heat of battle, allies keep dropping dead, croaking last words about a portal or other.



Thank you double-sided Sellotape.

"But am I into furrries? That's the question," she says"

The mysterious Amanda de Desirae seems to know what's going on, barking out orders in a coat that reveals a bit of tit and a navel, which us poor little Gibberlings are not even at eye level with, and lack the acrobatic skills needed to do a double-decker stand-on-shoulders trick.

"Help! Don't just stand there!" she yells, imploring us three teddy bears to fight off a succession of Astral Demons while she opens a portal.

Job done, we leap through and find ourselves in a rock surrounded by Bearded Crabs, another first. Activating a Mysterious Meteorite Stone takes us to a forest, where we murder eight beautiful deer so someone can knock up a bit of venison.

FURRY ORGY

Finding ourselves at the edge of the world, I attempt to strike up a chat with a pair of Night Elves.

"Evening all, what's happening here?" I chance.

"An orgy," replies pink-haired Azlea.

"Excellent. May we join?" I enquire.

"Females only sorry. Where the boys aren't!" says Azlea.

"I think one of us is female," I say.



So wrong in so many ways.

"But am I into furrries? That's the question," she says.

"You tell me," I say. "Bear in mind there are three of us."

At this point Azlea tries to palm us off on her friend Rainada for one silver. Rainada is having none of it though.

"I'm not even sure we have genitals," I shrug.

For something to do, we start dancing. Azlea claims that it reminds her (or possibly him) of a stripper dance. Something of an expert, she tells me that five or six years ago she used to go to strip clubs in Montreal almost every week. I tell her that I once went to a club there and a stripper winked at me with her arse.

"A stripper once brought a guy on stage, tied him to chair and shaved his pubes," she counters. "Beat that!"

"Strong," I say. **PCZ**



Furrries do The Matrix.



It's the Family Hill.

PCZONE

Future Publishing Ltd
2 Balcombe Street, London, NW1 6NW
Tel 020 7042 4720 Fax 020 7042 4729
Email letters@pczone.co.uk
Website pczone.co.uk

THE REPUBLIC

Acting Editor Steve Hogarty
Production Editor Richard Cosgrove
Hardware Editor Phil Wand
Staff Writer David Brown
Art Editor Matt Kendall
Deputy Art Editor James Roff
Contributors Pavel Barter, Jon 'Log' Blyth, Nick Brakespear, Phil Cameron, Lewis Denby, Adam Glick, Matt Hill, Steve Hill, Dave James and Paul Presley.
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SUBSCRIPTIONS

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International hotline +44 (0) 1604 251045
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Chief Executive Stevie Spring
Non-executive Chairman Roger Parry
Group Finance Director John Bowman
Tel +44 (0)20 7042 4000 (London)
Tel +44 (0)1225 442244 (Bath)

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Contact us

Website pczone.co.uk

Email letters@pczone.co.uk

Post PC ZONE, Future Publishing,
2 Balcombe Street,
London, NW1 6NW

Phone 020 7042 4720

Fax 020 7042 4729

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TINY COMPO

221: Jared Keith

Winning Battlefield: Bad
Company 2

KING OF LETTERS

221: Jordan (well done)

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PCZONE 129

From the creators of Journo-bot comes...

EDIT-BOT 4000

It only does everything!

ATTENTION DEAR PUBLISHER!

As the oceans doth pander to the vagrant moon, so too do editors of *PC ZONE*, their fallible, biological forms stirred to wanderlust by the very forces of the heavenly bodies. But transient and disloyal meat editors are a thing of the past, now that the highly desirable EDIT-BOT 4000 is here!

Simply place an EDIT-BOT 4000 within 10 yards of an empty flatplan and forget about it for weeks at a time. The EDIT-BOT 4000 will do the rest!

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- Head spins at 4,000rpm when happy
- Is always happy
- Has 10 optimistic phrases that it warmly chuckles to itself
- Responds positively to rape scenarios, metaphorical and otherwise
- Will never use the word 'rape' simply for impact

"Looks like it's going to be another one of those weeks."

"Let's show this deadline what for."

"I have noticed that 'days' are longer than 'working days'. Surely this is the wrong way around."

NEW!
FOR 2010

"Go team."

"Those clowns at Activision did it again. What a bunch of clowns."

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ART-BOT 4000

Fully compatible with last year's version of *InDesign*. Variable settings, from "Metro Letters Pages" right up to "Ambitious *WIRED* Cover Feature"!



Next Month!

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WEDNESDAY
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WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

MAFIA II

THE REVIEW

It's been eight years coming, but the sequel to the mobster classic is finally here. Is it fantastic, or is it stinky bumgrapes? There is literally no way of knowing until you **read our review**.



REVIEWED!

APB

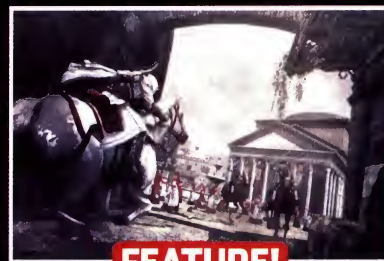
The **crime starting and crime stopping** MMO is here and it's time to put a number on it.



FEATURE!

WOW: CATAclysm

We reverse the news truck up to your rear entrance and off-load crates of news and screens.



FEATURE!

ASSASSIN'S CREED: BROTHERHOOD

Ezio's back, bouncing about on Roman roofs! This time it's papal.

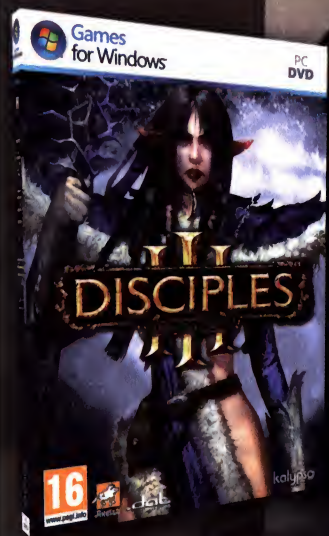
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